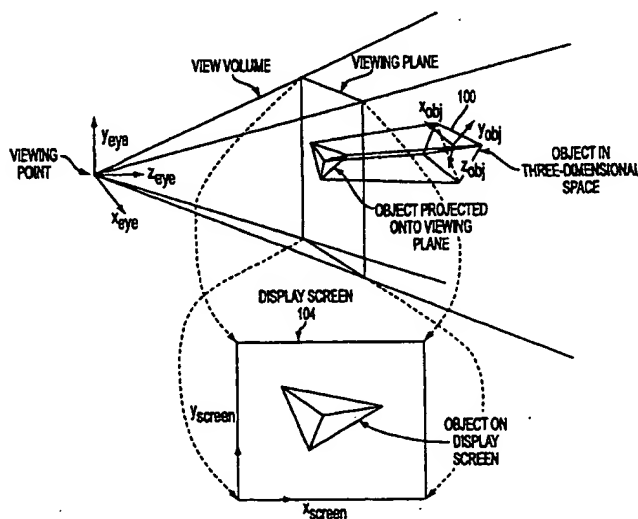




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(54) Title: APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR GEOMETRY OPERATIONS IN A 3D-GRAPHICS PIPELINE



## (57) Abstract

An apparatus and methods for rendering 3D-graphics images preferably includes a port for receiving commands from a graphics application, an output for sending a rendered image to a display and a geometry-operations pipeline, coupled to the port and to the output, the geometry-operations pipeline including a block for performing transformations. In one embodiment, the block for performing transformations includes a co-extensive logical and first physical stages, as well as a second physical stage including multiple logical stages. The second physical stage includes multiple logical stages that interleave their execution.

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# APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR GEOMETRY OPERATIONS IN A 3D-GRAPHICS PIPELINE

## FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to high-performance 3-D graphics imaging. More particularly, the invention relates to geometry operations in a 3D-graphics pipeline, operations such as transformations, clippings, decompositions and lighting calculations.

## Related Applications

This application claims the benefit under 35 USC Section 119(e) of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/097,336 filed 20 August 1998 and entitled GRAPHICS PROCESSOR WITH DEFERRED SHADING; claims the benefit under 35 USC Section 120 of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 09/213,990 filed 17 December 1998 entitled HOW TO DO TANGENT SPACE LIGHTING IN A DEFERRED SHADING ARCHITECTURE; each of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

This application is also related to the following U.S. Patent Applications, each of which are incorporated herein by reference:

Serial No. 09/213,990, filed 17 December 1998, entitled HOW TO DO TANGENT SPACE LIGHTING IN A DEFERRED SHADING ARCHITECTURE (Atty. Doc. No. A-66397);

Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR PERFORMING SETUP OPERATIONS IN A 3-D GRAPHICS PIPELINE USING UNIFIED PRIMITIVE DESCRIPTORS (Atty. Doc. No. A-66382);

Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled POST-FILE SORTING SETUP (Atty. Doc. No. A-66383);

Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled TILE RELATIVE Y-VALUES AND SCREEN RELATIVE X-VALUES (Atty. Doc. No. A-66384);

Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled SYSTEM, APPARATUS AND METHOD FOR SPATIALLY SORTING IMAGE DATA IN A THREE-

- 1 DIMENSIONAL GRAPHICS PIPELINE (Atty. Doc. No. A-66380);  
Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled SYSTEM, APPARATUS  
AND METHOD FOR GENERATING GUARANTEED CONSERVATIVE MEMORY  
ESTIMATE FOR SORTING OBJECT GEOMETRY IN A THREE-DIMENSIONAL  
5 GRAPHICS PIPELINE (Atty. Doc. No. A-66381);  
Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled SYSTEM, APPARATUS  
AND METHOD FOR BALANCING RENDERING RESOURCES IN A THREE-  
DIMENSIONAL GRAPHICS PIPELINE (Atty. Doc. No. A-66379);  
9 Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled GRAPHICS PROCESSOR  
WITH PIPELINE STATE STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL (Atty. Doc. No. A-66378);  
Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled METHOD AND  
APPARATUS FOR GENERATING TEXTURE (Atty. Doc. No. A-66398);  
13 Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled APPARATUS AND  
METHOD FOR GEOMETRY OPERATIONS IN A 3D GRAPHICS PIPELINE (Atty.  
Doc. No. A-66373);  
Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled APPARATUS AND  
17 METHOD FOR FRAGMENT OPERATIONS IN A 3D GRAPHICS PIPELINE (Atty.  
Doc. No. A-66399); and  
Serial No. \_\_\_\_\_, filed 20 August 1999, entitled DEFERRED SHADING  
GRAPHICS PIPELINE PROCESSOR (Atty. Doc. No. A-66360).

21

## BACKGROUND

### Three-Dimensional Computer Graphics

Computer graphics is the art and science of generating pictures with a  
25 computer. Generation of pictures, or images, is commonly called rendering. Generally, in  
three-dimensional (3D) computer graphics, geometry that represents surfaces (or volumes)  
of objects in a scene is translated into pixels stored in a framebuffer and then displayed on  
a display device.

29 In a 3D animation, a sequence of still images is displayed, giving the  
illusion of motion in three-dimensional space. Interactive 3D computer graphics allows a  
user to change his viewpoint or change the geometry in real-time, thereby requiring the  
rendering system to create new images on the fly in real time.

33 In 3D computer graphics, each renderable object generally has its own local  
object coordinate system and, therefore, needs to be translated (or transformed) from object

1 coordinates to pixel-display coordinates. Conceptually, this translation is a four-step  
process: 1) translation from object coordinates to world coordinates, the coordinate system  
for the entire scene, 2) translation from world coordinates to eye coordinates, based on the  
viewing point of the scene, 3) translation from eye coordinates to perspective-translated  
5 eye coordinates and 4) translation from perspective-translated eye coordinates to pixel  
(screen) coordinates. These translation steps can be compressed into one or two steps by  
pre-computing appropriate translation matrices before any translation occurs.

(Translation from object coordinates includes scaling for size enlargement  
9 or shrink. Perspective scaling makes farther objects appear smaller. Pixel coordinates are  
points in three-dimensional space in either screen precision (that is to say, pixels) or object  
precision (that is to say, high-precision numbers, usually floating-point).

Once the geometry is in screen coordinates, it is broken into a set of  
13 pixel-color values (that is, "rasterized") that are stored into the framebuffer.

A summary of the prior-art rendering process can be found in Watt,  
Fundamentals of Three-dimensional Computer Graphics (Addison-Wesley Publishing  
Company, 1989, reprinted 1991, ISBN 0-201-15442-0, herein "Watt" and incorporated by  
17 reference), particularly Chapter 5, "The Rendering Process," pages 97 to 113, and Foley et  
al., Computer Graphics: Principles and Practice, 2nd edition (Addison-Wesley Publishing  
Company, 1990, reprinted with corrections 1991, ISBN 0-201-12110-7, herein "Foley et  
al." and incorporated by reference).

21 **Fig. 1** shows a three-dimensional object, a tetrahedron, with its own  
coordinate axes ( $x_{\text{object}}$ ,  $y_{\text{object}}$ ,  $z_{\text{object}}$ ). The three-dimensional object is translated, scaled and  
placed in the viewing point's coordinate system based on ( $x_{\text{eye}}$ ,  $y_{\text{eye}}$ ,  $z_{\text{eye}}$ ). The object is  
projected onto the viewing plane, thereby correcting for perspective. At this point, the  
25 object appears to have become two-dimensional. The object's z-coordinates, however, are  
preserved for later use in hidden-surface removal. The object is finally translated to screen  
coordinates, based on ( $x_{\text{screen}}$ ,  $y_{\text{screen}}$ ,  $z_{\text{screen}}$ ), where  $z_{\text{screen}}$  is going perpendicularly into the  
page. Points on the object now have their x and y coordinates described by pixel location  
29 (and fractions thereof) within the display screen and their z coordinates in a scaled version  
of distance from the viewing point.

1

### Generic 3D-Graphics Pipeline

Many hardware renderers have been developed. See, for example, Deering et al., "Leo: A System for Cost Effective 3D Shaded Graphics," SIGGRAPH93 Proceedings, 1-6 August 1993, Computer Graphics Proceedings, Annual Conference Series (ACM SIGGRAPH, 1993, Soft-cover ISBN 0-201-58889-7 and CD-ROM ISBN 0-201-56997-3, herein "Deering et al." and incorporated by reference), particularly at pages 101 to 108. Deering et al. includes a diagram of a generic 3D-graphics pipeline (that is to say, a renderer, or a rendering system) that it describes as "truly generic, as at the top level nearly every commercial 3D graphics accelerator fits this abstraction." This pipeline diagram is reproduced here as Fig. 6. (In this figure, the blocks with rounded corners typically represent functions or process operations, while sharp-cornered rectangles typically represent stored data or memory.)

Such pipeline diagrams convey the process of rendering but do not describe any particular hardware. This document presents a new graphics pipeline that shares some of the steps of the generic 3D-graphics pipeline. Each of the steps in the generic 3D-graphics pipeline is briefly explained here. (Processing of polygons is assumed throughout this document, but other methods for describing 3D geometry could be substituted. For simplicity of explanation, triangles are used as the type of polygon in the described methods.)

As seen in Fig. 6, the first step within the floating point-intensive functions of the generic 3D-graphics pipeline after the data input (step 612) is the transformation step (step 614), described above. The transformation step also includes "get next polygon."

The second step, the clip test, checks the polygon to see if it is at least partially contained in the view volume (sometimes shaped as a frustum) (step 616). If the polygon is not in the view volume, it is discarded. Otherwise, processing continues.

The third step is face determination, where polygons facing away from the viewing point are discarded (step 618). Generally, face determination is applied only to objects that are closed volumes.

The fourth step, lighting computation, generally includes the set up for Gouraud shading and/or texture mapping with multiple light sources of various types but

1 could also be set up for Phong shading or one of many other choices (step 622).

The fifth step, clipping, deletes any portion of the polygon that is outside of the view volume because that portion would not project within the rectangular area of the viewing plane (step 624). Conventionally, coordinates including color texture coordinates  
5 must be created for each new primitive. Polygon clipping is computationally expensive.

The sixth step, perspective divide, does perspective correction for the projection of objects onto the viewing plane (step 626). At this point, the points representing vertices of polygons are converted to pixel-space coordinates by step seven,  
9 the screen space conversion step (step 628).

The eighth step (step 632), set up for an incremental render, computes the various begin, end and increment values needed for edge walking and span interpolation (e.g.: x, y and z coordinates, RGB color, texture map space, u and v coordinates and the  
13 like).

Within the drawing-intensive functions, edge walking (step 634) incrementally generates horizontal spans for each raster line of the display device by incrementing values from the previously generated span (in the same polygon), thereby  
17 "walking" vertically along opposite edges of the polygon. Similarly, span interpolation (step 636) "walks" horizontally along a span to generate pixel values, including a z-coordinate value indicating the pixel's distance from the viewing point. Finally, the z-test and/or alpha blending (also referred to as Testing and Blending) (step 638) generates  
21 a final pixel-color value. The pixel values also include color values, which can be generated by simple Gouraud shading (that is to say, interpolation of vertex-color values) or by more computationally expensive techniques such as texture mapping (possibly using multiple texture maps blended together), Phong shading (that is to say, per-fragment  
25 lighting) and/or bump mapping (perturbing the interpolated surface normal).

After drawing-intensive functions are completed, a double-buffered MUX output look-up table operation is performed (step 644). The generic 3D-graphics pipeline includes a double-buffered framebuffer, so a double-buffered MUX is also included. An  
29 output lookup table is included for translating color-map values.

By comparing the generated z-coordinate value to the corresponding value stored in the Z Buffer, the Z-test either keeps the new pixel values (if it is closer to the viewing point than previously stored value for that pixel location) by writing it into the

1 framebuffer or discards the new pixel values (if it is farther).

At this step, antialiasing methods can blend the new pixel color with the old pixel color. The z-buffered blend generally includes most of the per-fragment operations, described below.

5 Finally, digital-to-analog conversion makes an analog signal for input to the display device.

The language of the OpenGL API is adopted, except as contraindicated herein. (See, for example, Open Architecture Review Board, OpenGL Reference Manual,  
9 2nd edition (Addison-Wesley Developers Press, 1996) and OpenGL Architecture Review Board, OpenGL Programming Guide, 2nd edition (Addison-Wesley, 1997), both incorporated herein by reference.

13 These and other goals of the invention will be readily apparent to one of skill in the art on reading the background above and the description below.

### SUMMARY

17 Herein are described apparatus and methods for rendering 3D-graphics images. In one embodiment, the apparatus include a port for receiving commands from a graphics application, an output for sending a rendered image to a display and a geometry-operations pipeline, coupled to the port and to the output, the  
21 geometry-operations pipeline including a block for performing transformations.

In one embodiment, the block for performing transformations includes a co-extensive logical and first physical stages, as well as a second physical stage including multiple logical stages. The second physical stage includes multiple logical stages that  
25 interleave their execution.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

29 Fig. 1 shows a three-dimensional object, a tetrahedron, in various coordinate systems.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating the components and data flow in the



1 geometry block 842.

Fig. 3 is a high-level block diagram illustrating the components and data flow in a 3D-graphics pipeline incorporating the invention.

Fig. 4 is a block diagram of the transformation unit.

5 Fig. 5 is a block diagram of the global packet controller.

Fig. 6 is a reproduction of the Deering et al. generic 3D-graphics pipeline.

Fig. 7 is a method-flow diagram of a preferred implementation of a 3D-graphics pipeline.

9 Fig. 8 illustrates a system for rendering three-dimensional graphics images.

Fig. 9 shows an example of how the cull block produces fragments from a partially obscured triangle.

13 Fig. 10 demonstrates how the pixel block processes a stamp's worth of fragments.

Figs. 11 and 12 are block diagrams of the pipeline stage A. Fig. 11 illustrates the stage A data-path elements, and Fig. 12 illustrates the instruction controller.

Fig. 13 is a block diagram of the clipping sub-unit.

17 Fig. 14 is a block diagram of the texture state machine.

Fig. 15 is a block diagram of the synchronization queues and the clipping sub-unit.

Fig. 16 illustrates the pipeline stage BC.

21 Fig. 17 is a block diagram of the instruction controller for the pipeline stage BC.

## DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENTS

25

### ABBREVIATIONS

Following are abbreviations which may appear in this description, along with their expanded meaning:

29 BKE: the back-end block 84C.

CFD: the command-fetch-and-decode block 841.

CUL: the cull block 846.

- 1           GEO: the geometry block 842.  
          MEX: the mode-extraction block 843.  
          MIJ: the mode-injection block 847.  
          PHG: the Phong block 84A.  
5           PIX: the pixel block 84B.  
          PXO: the pixel-out block 280.  
          SRT: the sort block 844.  
          TEX: the texture block 849.  
9           VSP: a visible stamp portion.

## OVERVIEW

### - The Rendering System

- 13           **Fig. 8 illustrates a system 800 for rendering three-dimensional graphics images. The rendering system 800 includes one or more of each of the following: data-processing units (CPUs) 810, memory 820, a user interface 830, a co-processor 840 such as a graphics processor, communication interface 850 and communications bus 860.**  
17           Of course, in an embedded system, some of these components may be missing, as is well understood in the art of embedded systems. In a distributed computing environment, some of these components may be on separate physical machines, as is well understood in the art of distributed computing.

- 21           The memory 820 typically includes high-speed, volatile random-access memory (RAM), as well as non-volatile memory such as read-only memory (ROM) and magnetic disk drives. Further, the memory 820 typically contains software 821. The software 821 is layered: Application software 8211 communicates with the operating  
25           system 8212, and the operating system 8212 communicates with the I/O subsystem 8213. The I/O subsystem 8213 communicates with the user interface 830, the co-processor 840 and the communications interface 850 by means of the communications bus 860.

          The user interface 830 includes a display monitor 831.

- 29           The communications bus 860 communicatively interconnects the CPU 810, memory 820, user interface 830, graphics processor 840 and communication interface 850.

          As noted earlier, U.S. Patent 4,996,666 describes SAMs, which may be used to implement memory portions in the present invention, for example in the graphics unit.

1           The address space of the co-processor 840 may overlap, be adjacent to  
and/or disjoint from the address space of the memory 820, as is well understood in the art  
of memory mapping. If, for example, the CPU 810 writes to an accelerated graphics port at  
a predetermined address and the graphics co-processor 840 reads at that same  
5   predetermined address, then the CPU 810 can be said to be writing to a graphics port and  
the graphics processor 840 to be reading from such a graphics port.

          The graphics processor 840 is implemented as a graphics pipeline, this  
pipeline itself possibly containing one or more pipelines. Fig. 3 is a high-level block  
9   diagram illustrating the components and data flow in a 3D-graphics pipeline 840  
incorporating the invention. The 3D-graphics pipeline 840 includes a  
command-fetch-and-decode block 841, a geometry block 842, a mode-extraction block  
843, a sort block 844, a setup block 845, a cull block 846, a mode-injection block 847, a  
13   fragment block 848, a texture block 849, a Phong block 84A, a pixel block 84B, a back-end  
block 84C and sort, polygon, texture and framebuffer memories 84D, 84E, 84F, 84G. The  
memories 84D, 84E, 84F, 84G may be a part of the memory 820.

          The command-fetch-and-decode block 841 handles communication with the  
17   host computer through the graphics port. It converts its input into a series of packets,,  
which it passes to the geometry block 842. Most of the input stream consists of  
geometrical data, that is to say, vertices that describe lines, points and polygons. The  
descriptions of these geometrical objects can include colors, surface normals, texture  
21   coordinates and so on. The input stream also contains rendering information such as  
lighting, blending modes and buffer functions.

          The geometry block 842 handles four major tasks: transformations,  
decompositions of all polygons into triangles, clipping and per-vertex lighting calculations  
25   for Gouraud shading. Block 842 preferably also generates texture coordinates including  
bi-normals and tangents.

          The geometry block 842 transforms incoming graphics primitives into a  
uniform coordinate space ("world space"). It then clips the primitives to the viewing  
29   volume ("frustum"). In addition to the six planes that define the viewing volume (left,  
right, top, bottom, front and back), the Subsystem provides six user-definable clipping  
planes. Preferably vertex color is computed before clipping. Thus, before clipping,  
geometry block 842 breaks polygons with more than three vertices into sets of triangles, to

1   simplify processing.

Finally, if there is any Gouraud shading in the frame, the geometry block 842 calculates the vertex colors that the fragment block 848 uses to perform the shading.

The mode-extraction block 843 separates the data stream into two parts:

5   vertices and everything else. Vertices are sent to the sort block 844. Everything else (lights, colors, texture coordinates, etc.), it stores in the polygon memory 84E, whence it can be retrieved by the mode-injection block 847. The polygon memory 84E is double buffered, so the mode-injection block 847 can read data for one frame while the  
9   mode-extraction block 843 is storing data for the next frame.

The mode data stored in the polygon memory falls into three major categories: per-frame data (such as lighting), per-primitive data (such as material properties) and per-vertex data (such as color). The mode-extraction and mode-injection  
13   blocks 843, 847 further divide these categories to optimize efficiency.

For each vertex, the mode-extraction block 843 sends the sort block 844 a packet containing the vertex data and a pointer (the "color pointer") into the polygon memory 84E. The packet also contains fields indicating whether the vertex represents a  
17   point, the endpoint of a line or the corner of a triangle. The vertices are sent in a strictly time-sequential order, the same order in which they were fed into the pipeline. Vertice data also encompasses vertices created by clipping. The packet also specifies whether the  
current vertex forms the last one in a given primitive, that is to say, whether it completes  
21   the primitive. In the case of triangle strips ("fans") and line strips ("loops"), the vertices are shared between adjacent primitives. In this case, the packets indicate how to identify the other vertices in each primitive.

The sort block 844 receives vertices from the mode-extraction block 843  
25   and sorts the resulting points, lines and triangles by tile. (A tile is a data structure described further below.) In the double-buffered sort memory 84D, the sort block 844 maintains a list of vertices representing the graphic primitives and a set of tile pointer lists, one list for each tile in the frame. When the sort block 844 receives a vertex that completes  
29   a primitive, it checks to see which tiles the primitive touches. For each tile a primitive touches, the sort block adds a pointer to the vertex to that tile's tile pointer list.

When the sort block 844 has finished sorting all the geometry in a frame, it sends the data to the setup block 845. Each sort-block output packet represents a complete

- 1 primitive. The sort block 844 sends its output in tile-by-tile order: all of the primitives that touch a given tile, then all of the primitives that touch the next tile, and so on. Thus, the sort block 844 may send the same primitive many times, once for each tile it touches.

The setup block 845 calculates spatial derivatives for lines and triangles.

- 5 The block 845 processes one tile's worth of data, one primitive at a time. When the block 845 is done, it sends the data on to the cull block 846.

- The setup block 845 also breaks stippled lines into separate line segments (each a rectangular region) and computes the minimum z value for each primitive within  
9 the tile.

Each packet output from the setup block 845 represents one primitive: a triangle, line segment or point.

- The cull block 846 accepts data one tile's worth at a time and divides its  
13 processing into two steps: SAM culling and sub-pixel culling. The SAM cull discards primitives that are hidden completely by previously processed geometry. The sub-pixel cull takes the remaining primitives (which are partly or entirely visible) and determines the visible fragments. The sub-pixel cull outputs one stamp's worth of fragments at a time,  
17 herein a "visible stamp portion." (A stamp is a data structure described further below.)

- Fig. 9 shows an example of how the cull block 846 produces fragments from a partially obscured triangle. A visible stamp portion produced by the cull block 846 contains fragments from only a single primitive, even if multiple primitives touch the  
21 stamp. Therefore, in the diagram, the output VSP contains fragments from only the gray triangle. The fragment formed by the tip of the white triangle is sent in a separate VSP, and the colors of the two VSPs are combined later in the pixel block 84B.

- Each pixel in a VSP is divided into a number of samples to determine how  
25 much of the pixel is covered by a given fragment. The pixel block 84B uses this information when it blends the fragments to produce the final color of the pixel.

- The mode-injection block 847 retrieves block-mode information (colors, material properties, etc.) from the polygon memory 84E and passes it downstream as  
29 required. To save bandwidth, the individual downstream blocks cache recently used mode information. The mode-injection block 847 keeps track of what information is cached downstream and only sends information as necessary.

The main work of the fragment block 848 is interpolation. The block 848

1 interpolates color values for Gouraud shading, surface normals for Phong shading and  
texture coordinates for texture mapping. It also interpolates surface tangents for use in the  
bump-mapping algorithm if bump maps are in use.

The fragment block 848 performs perspective-corrected interpolation using  
5 barycentric coefficients, and preferably also handles texture level of detail manipulations.

The texture block 849 applies texture maps to the pixel fragments. Texture  
maps are stored in the texture memory 84F. Unlike the other memory stores described  
previously, the texture memory 84F is single buffered. It is loaded from the memory 820  
9 using the graphics port interface.

Textures are mip-mapped. That is to say, each texture comprises a series of  
texture maps at different levels of detail, each map representing the appearance of the  
texture at a given distance from the eye point. To reproduce a texture value for a given  
13 pixel fragment, the text block 849 performs tri-linear interpolation from the texture maps,  
to approximate the correct level of detail. The texture block 849 also performs other  
interpolation methods, such as anisotropic interpolation.

The texture block 849 supplies interpolated texture values (generally as  
17 RGBA color values) to the Phong block 84A on a per-fragment basis. Bump maps  
represent a special kind of texture map. Instead of a color, each texel of a bump map  
contains a height field gradient or a normal vector.

The Phong block 84A performs Phong shading for each pixel fragment. It  
21 uses the material and lighting information supplied by the mode-injection block 847, the  
texture colors from the texture block 849 and the surface normal generated by the fragment  
block 848 to determine the fragment's apparent color. If bump mapping is in use, the  
Phong block 847 uses the interpolated height field gradient from the texture block 849 to  
25 perturb the fragment's surface normal before shading.

The pixel block 84B receives VSPs, where each fragment has an  
independent color value. The pixel block 84B performs a scissor test, an alpha test, stencil  
operations, a depth test, blending, dithering and logic operations on each sample in each  
29 pixel. When the pixel block 84B has accumulated a tile's worth of finished pixels, it  
blends the samples within each pixel (thereby performing antialiasing of pixels) and sends  
then to the back end 84C for storage in the framebuffer 84G.

Fig. 10 demonstrates how the pixel block 84B processes a stamp's worth of

1 fragments. In this example, the pixel block receives two VSPs, one from a gray triangle  
and one from a white triangle. It then blends the fragments and the background color to  
produce the final pixels. The block 84B weights each fragment according to how much of  
the pixel it covers or, to be more precise, by the number of samples it covers.

5 (The pixel-ownership test is a part of the window system and is left to the  
back end 84C.)

The back-end block 84C receives a tile's worth of pixels at a time from the  
pixel block 84B and stores them into the framebuffer 84G. The back end 84C also sends a  
9 tile's worth of pixels back to the pixel block 84B because specific framebuffer values can  
survive from frame to frame. For example, stencil-bit values can remain constant over  
many frames but can be used in all of those frames.

In addition to controlling the framebuffer 84G, the back-end block 84C  
13 performs pixel-ownership tests, 2D drawing and sends the finished frame to the output  
devices. The block 84C provides the interface between the framebuffer 84G and the  
monitor 831 and video output.

## 17 - The Geometry Block

The geometry block 842 is the first computation unit at the front end of the  
graphical pipeline 840. The engine 842 deals mainly with per-vertex operations, like the  
transformation of vertex coordinates and normals. The Frontend deals with fetching and  
21 decoding the Graphics Hardware Commands. The Frontend loads the necessary transform  
matrices, material and light parameters and other mode settings into the input registers of  
the geometry block 842. The geometry block 842 sends transformed vertex coordinates,  
normals, generated and/or transformed texture coordinates and per-vertex colors to the  
25 mode-extraction and sort blocks 843, 844. The mode-extraction block 843 stores the  
"color" data and modes in the polygon memory 84E. The sort block 844 organizes the  
per-vertex "spatial" data by tile and writes it into the sort memory 84D.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram illustrating the components and data flow in the  
29 geometry block 842. The block 842 includes a transformation unit 210, a lighting unit 220  
and a clipping unit 230. The transformation unit 210 receives data from the  
command-fetch-and-decode block 841 and outputs to both the lighting and the clipping  
units 220, 230. The lighting unit 220 outputs to the clipping unit 230. The clipping unit

1 230 outputs to the mode-extraction and sort blocks 843, 844.

Fig. 4 is a block diagram of the transformation unit 210. The unit 210 includes a global packet controller 211 and two physical stages: a pipeline stage A 212 and a pipeline stage BC 213. The global packet controller 211 receives data from the command-fetch-and-decode block 841 and an auxiliary ring (not shown). The unit 212 outputs to the pipeline stage A 212. The pipeline stage A 212 outputs to the pipeline stage BC 213. The stage BC 213 outputs to the lighting and clipping units 220, 230.

Fig. 13 is a block diagram of the clipping sub-unit 230. The unit 230 includes synchronization queues 231, clipping and formatting sub-units 232, 233 and output queue 234. The synchronization queues 231 receive input from the transformation and lighting units 210, 220 and output to the clipping sub-unit 232. The clipping sub-unit 232 in turn outputs to the format sub-unit 233 that itself in turn outputs to the output queue 234. The queue 234 outputs to the mode-extraction block 843.

Fig. 13 also gives an overview of the pipeline stages K through N as the clipping sub-unit 230 implements them. The clipping sub-unit 233 includes three logical pipeline stages: K, L and M. The format sub-unit 234 one: N.

The output queue 234 does not work on pipeline stage boundaries. Rather, it sends out packets whenever valid data is in its queue and the mode-extraction block 843 is ready.

Fig. 5 is a block diagram of the global packet controller 211. The controller 211 includes a CFD interface state machine 2111, an auxiliary-ring control 2112, an auxiliary-ring standard register node 2113, an auxiliary-ring interface buffer 2114, buffers 2115, 2116, 2117 and MUXes 2118, 2119, 211A.

The CFD interface state machine 2111 receives input from the command-fetch-and-decode unit 841 via the CFD command and data bus, from the auxiliary ring controller 2112 via a Ring\_Request signal 211B and from a Data\_Ready and Texture Queue Addresses from Pipeline Stage K signals 211D, and 211C, where signal 211C is a handshake signal between CFD and GEO. The state machine 2111 generates Write\_Address and Write\_Enable signals 211E, 211F as control inputs to the MUX 2118, as well as Acknowledgment and Advance\_Packet/Pipeline signals 211G, 211H.

The auxiliary-ring controller 2112 receives as input a Ring\_Request signal 211L from the node 2113 and Control from Pipeline Stage P 211K. The controller 2112



1 generates four signals: a Ring\_Command 211M as input to the MUX 2118, an unnamed  
 signal 211N as input to the buffer 2114, an Address/Data\_Bus 211O as input to the MUX  
 2119 and the Ring\_Request signal 211B input to the state machine 2111.

The auxiliary-ring standard register node 2113 receives as input the  
 5 auxiliary-ring bus from the command-fetch-and-decode block 841 and the  
 Address/Data\_Bus 211O from the controller 2112. The node 2113 generates two signals:  
 the Ring\_Request signal 211L to the controller 2112 and the auxiliary-ring bus to the  
 mode-extraction block 843.

9 The auxiliary-ring interface buffer 2114 receives as input the output of the  
 MUX 2119 and the unnamed signal 211N from the controller 2112 and generates an  
 unnamed input 211P to the MUX 211A.

The dual-input MUX 2118 receives as input the command bus from the  
 13 command-fetch-and-decode command bus and the Ring\_Command signal 211M from the  
 controller 2112. Its output goes to the pipeline stage A command register.

The dual-input MUX 2119 receives as input the data bus from the pipeline  
 stage P and the Address/Data\_Bus 211O. Its outputs is the input to the buffer 2114.

17 The dual-input MUX 211A receives as input the unnamed signal 211P and  
 the Data\_Bus from the command-fetch-and-decode block 841. Its output goes to the  
 pipeline stage A vertex buffer 2121.

Figs. 11 and 12 are block diagrams of the pipeline stage A 212. The stage  
 21 A 212 includes an instruction controller 2126 and data-path elements including: an input  
 buffer 2121, a matrix memory 2125, parallel math functional units 2122, an output buffer  
 2123 and various MUXes 2124. Fig. 11 illustrates the stage A 212 data-path elements, and  
 Fig. 12 illustrates the instruction controller 2126.

25 The vertex buffer A 2121 receives as input the output of the global packet  
 controller MUX 211A and generates outputs 2127 to the four SerMod\_F32 serial  
 dot-product generators 2122 through the MUXes 2124b and 2124d.

The vertex buffer A 2121 also generates outputs 2126 that, through the  
 29 MUXes 2124e, the delay elements 2127 and the MUXes 2124c, form the bus 2125. The  
 bus 2125 feeds the vertex buffers BC 2123 and the matrix memory 2125.

The matrix memory 2125 receives as input the output 2125 of the MUXes  
 2124c and generate as output the A input for the parallel serial dot-product generators

1   **2122.**

The serial dot-product generators **2122** receives as their A inputs the output of the matrix memory **2125** and as their B inputs the outputs of the MUXes **2124d**. The products generated are inputs to the MUXes **2124c**.

5           The vertex buffers BC **2123** receive as inputs the bus **2125** output from the MUXes **2124c** and generate two outputs: an input to the MUXes **2124b** and an output to the stage B cross bar.

9           The vertex buffers **2121**, **2123** are double buffers, large enough to hold two full-performance-vertex worth of data.

The tri-input MUXes **2124b** receive as inputs an unnamed signal from stage B, an output from the vertex buffers BC **2123**, and the output **2127** from the vertex buffer A **2121**. The outputs of the MUXes **2124b** are inputs to respective MUXes **2124d**.

13           Each of the quad-input MUXes **2124d** receives as inputs the four outputs of the four MUX **2124b**. The output of a MUX **2124d** is the B input of a respective serial dot-product generator **2122**.

17           Each of the bi-input MUXes **2124e** receives as inputs the output of a respective MUX **2124b** and an output **2126** of the vertex buffer A **2121**. The output of a MUX **2124e** is the input of respective delay element **2127**.

The input of a delay element **2127** is the output of a respective MUX **2124e**, and the output of the element **2127** is an input of a respective MUX **2124c**.

21           The inputs of a bi-input MUX **2124c** are the R output of a respective serial dot-product generator **2122** and the output of a respective delay element **2127**.

25           As illustrated in Fig. 12, the instruction controller **2126** includes a geometry command word (GCW) controller **1210**, a decoder **1220**, a jump-table memory **1230**, a jump table **1240**, a microcode instruction memory **1250**, a texture state machine **1260**, hardware instruction memory **1270**, a write-enable memory **1280**, field-merge logic **1290** and a command register **12A0**.

29           Fig. 16 illustrates the pipeline stage BC **213**. The stage BC **213** includes the vertex buffers BC **2123**, the scratch-pad memory **2132**, the math functional units **2133**, as well as the delay elements **2134**, the MUXes **2135** and the registers **2136**.

Fig. 15 is a block diagram of the synchronization queues **231** and the clipping sub-unit **232**. Fig. 15 shows the separate vertex-data synchronization queues

1 231a, 231b and 231c for spatial, texture and color data, respectively.

Fig. 15 also shows the primitive-formation header queues 2321, 2323, 2324 composing the clipping sub-unit 232. The sub-unit 232 also includes a scratch-pad GPR 2322, a functional math unit 2325, a delay element 2326, MUXes 2327 and registers 2328.

5 The spatial, texture and color queues 231a-c feed into the primitive, texture and color queues 2321, 2323, 2324, respectively. (The spatial queue 231 feeds into the primitive queue 2321 through the MUX 2327h.)

The primitive queue 2321 receives input from the MUX 2327h and outputs  
9 to the MUXes 2327a, 2327d and 2327e from a first output and to the MUXes 2327c and 2327e from a second output.

The text queue 2323 outputs to the MUXes 2327a and 2327f.

The color queue 2324 outputs to the MUXes 2327a and 2327c.

13 The functional math unit 2325 receives input from the MUX 2327d at its A input, from the MUX 2327e at its B input and from the MUX 2327b at its C input. The outputs  $U_1$  and  $\Delta$  feed into the MUXes 2327d and 2327e, respectively. The output R feeds into the MUXes 2327g, 2327d, 2327e and the MUXes 2327b and 2327d (again) via a  
17 register 2328.

The delay element 2326 receives as input the output of the MUX 2327b and generates an output to the MUX 2327g.

The quad-input MUX 2327a receives input each of the primitive, texture  
21 and color queues 2321, 2323, 2324. The MUX 2327a outputs to the MUXes 2327b and 2327e.

The quad-input MUX 2327b receives input from the primitive queue 2321, the scratch-pad GPR 2322, the MUX 2327a and the R output of the functional math unit  
25 2325 via a hold register 2328. The MUX 2327b generates an output to (the C input of) the math unit 2325 and the delay element 2326.

The bi-input MUX 2327c receives as inputs the second output of the primitive queue 2321 and the output of the color queue 2324. The MUX 2327c outputs to  
29 the MUX 2327f directly and through a hold register 2328.

The quint-input MUX 2327d receives as inputs the R output of the math unit 2325, directly and through a hold register 2328, as well as the  $U_1$  output of the math unit 2325, the output of the scratch-pad 2322 and the first output of the primitive queue

1   2321. The MUX 2327d generates an output to the A input of the math unit 2325.

The quint-input MUX 2327e receives as inputs the R output of the math unit 2325, directly and through a hold register 2328, as well as the  $\Delta$  output of the math unit 2325, the output of the MUX 2327a and the second output of the primitive queue 2321.

5   The MUX 2327e generates an output to the B inputs of the math unit 2325.

The bi-input MUX 2327f receives as inputs the output of the MUX 2327c directly and through a hold register 2328, as well as the output of the texture queue 2323. The MUX 2327e generates an output to the vertex buffer 2329 between the clipping and

9   format sub-units 232 233.

The bi-input MUX 2327g receives as inputs the R output of the math unit 2325 and the output of the delay element 2326. The MUX 2327g generates an output into the MUX 2327h and the scratch-pad GPR through a hold register 2328.

13   The bi-input MUX 2327h receives as inputs the output of the MUX 2327g (through a hold register 2328) and the output of the spatial queue 231a. The output of the MUX 2327h feeds into the primitive queue 2321.

The math unit 2325 is an mathFunc-F32 dot-product generator.

17   Fig. 17 is a block diagram of the instruction controller 1800 for the pipeline stage BC 213. The instruction controller 1800 includes command registers 1810, a global-command-word controller 1820, a decoder 1830, a jump-table memory 1840, hardware jump table 1850, microcode instruction memory 1860, hardware instruction  
21   memory 1870, field-merge logic 1880 and write-enable memory 1890.

Fig. 14 is a block diagram of the texture state machine.

## PROTOCOLS

25   The geometry block 842 performs all spatial transformations and projections, Vertex lighting, texture-coordinates generation and transformation, surface-tangents computations (generation, transformation and cross products), line stipple-pattern wrapping, primitive formation, polygon clipping, and Z offset. Further, the  
29   geometry block 842 stores all of the transformation matrices and the Vertex lighting coefficients. The block 842 contains several units: transform 210, lighting 220, and clipping 230.

For a ten million triangles-per-second rate, the geometry block 842

1 processes vertices at a rate of about 1/20 cycles, assuming that about 90% of the time  
vertex data is available for processing and that vertices are in the form of triangle strips.  
Since the pipeline #\_840 design is for average-size triangles at this rate, the performance  
of remainder of the pipeline 840 fluctuates according to the geometry size. The geometry  
5 block 842 compensates for this by selecting a maximum rate slightly better than this  
average rate. There is virtually no latency limitation.

Thus, the geometry block 842 is a series of 20-cycle pipeline stages, with a  
double or triple buffer between each of the stages. An upstream pipeline stage writes one  
9 side of a buffer while the downstream stage reads from the other side data previously  
written to that side of the buffer.

In addition to vertex data, the geometry block 842 also receives state  
information. The geometry block 842 could consume this state information or pass it down  
13 to blocks later in the graphics pipeline 840. Since a state change does not affect data ahead  
of it in the pipeline 840, the geometry block 842 handles state as though it were vertex  
data: It passes it through in order.

The geometry block 842 also controls the data bus connecting itself and the  
17 mode-extraction block 843. Using 32-bits wide bus yields slightly better bandwidth than  
required for the 10 million triangles/second goal (at 333 MHz).

#### - The Transformation Unit

21 The transformation unit 210 transforms object coordinates ( $X_o, Y_o, Z_o, W_o$ )  
to eye coordinates ( $X_e, Y_e, Z_e, W_e$ ), or directly transforms them to clip coordinates ( $X_c, Y_c,$   
 $Z_c, W_c$ ). The transformation unit also calculates window coordinates  $X_w, Y_w, Z_w$ , and  
further implements stipple repeat-pattern calculations. The transformation unit 210  
25 transforms user-provided texture coordinates ( $S_o, T_o, R_o, Q_o$ ) into eye coordinates ( $S_e, T_e,$   
 $R_e, Q_e$ ) or, if requested by the application it generates them from the spatial data.  
Effectively, this transforms spatial data in eye (EYE\_LINEAR) or object space  
(OBJECT\_LINEAR) into texture coordinates in object space. The transformation unit 210  
29 provides a third type of texture-generation mechanism: namely, generating texture  
coordinates that preferably access a texture representing the surface of a sphere, e.g., for  
use in reflection mapping using OpenGL or other methodologies."

The transformation unit 210 transforms normal-vector object coordinates

1 (Nxo, Nyo, Nzo) into eye coordinates (Nxe, Nye, Nze). The same transformation can  
apply to bi-normal object coordinates (Bxo, Byo, Bzo) and surface-tangent object  
coordinates (Gxo, Gyo, Gzo) to generate eye-coordinate representation of these vectors  
(Bxe, Bye, Bze, and Gxe, Gye, Gze). Similar to the texture coordinates, bi-normal and  
5 surface-tangent vectors can be generated from spatial data. Additionally, various options  
of vector cross-product calculations are possible, depending on the bump-mapping  
algorithm currently active. Regardless of the method of attaining the normal, bi-normal  
and surface-tangent vectors, the transformation unit 210 converts the eye coordinates into  
9 magnitude and direction form for use in the lighting sub-unit and in the phong unit.

The trivial reject/accept test for both the user defined and the view volume  
clip planes are performed on each vertex. The results of the test are passed down to the  
clipping unit 230. The area calculation determining the visibility of the front or the back  
13 face of a primitive is also calculated here, and the result is passed down to the clipping unit  
230.

#### - The Vertex Lighting Unit

17 The Vertex lighting unit 220 implements the per-vertex computations for  
the twenty-four Vertex lights, combining all enabled lights before they leave this unit. The  
total specular component may not be combined with the remaining light components if the  
SINGLE\_COLOR mode is not set. This allows interpolation of the specular component  
21 independent of the rest of the light information later in the pipeline.

The lighting unit 220 also implements the "color material" state and  
substitutions (Vertex only).

#### 25 - The Polygon-Clipping/Primitive-Formation Unit

The clipping unit 230 has a duplicate copy of the user-defined clip plane,  
while the view-volume plane (Wc), which is loaded by the aux rng, passes down with  
vertex data. This unit 230 tests every polygon to determine if the shape is fully inside or  
29 fully outside the view volume. A primitive that is neither fully inside or fully outside it  
clips off until the remaining shape is fully inside the volume. Because interpolation of the  
data between vertices that are part of a filled primitive occurs later in the pipeline, the  
original vertex information is retained with the new vertex spatial information. The

- 1 clipping unit 230 interpolates line primitives at a significant performance cost. This  
preferred implementation advantageously avoids the necessity to create new spatial data  
and new texCoords normals, colors, etc. at vertices that are created in the clipping process.

The OpenGL specification defines ten distinct types of geometric

- 5 primitives: points, lines, line strips, line loops, triangles, triangle strips, triangle fans,  
quadrilaterals, quadrilateral strip, and polygons. However, the design of the pipeline 840 is  
based on processing triangles, so the clipping unit 230 breaks polygons with more than 3  
vertices into smaller components. Additionally, the clipping unit 230 implements  
9 operations that change the data associated with a shading, for example, vertex flat-type  
shading.

The geometry block 842 stores data in 32-bit floating-point format.

- However, the data bus to the mode-extraction block 843 is only 24 bits. Thus, the clipping  
13 unit 230 converts, clamps and packs data before its leaving the unit. The bus to the  
mode-extraction block 843 leaves directly from this unit 230.

1           - Input and Output

The geometry block 842 interfaces with the command-fetch-and-decode block 841, an auxiliary ring and the mode-extraction block 843. The command-fetch-and-decode block 841 is the normal source of input packets to the geometry block 842, and MEX is the normal sink for output packets from The geometry block 842. The auxiliary ring provides special access to the hardware not normally associated with processing geometry, such as micro-code or random access to The geometry block 842 data-path registers.

9           Normal input to the geometry block 842 is from the command-fetch-and-decode block 841. Special inputs from the auxiliary ring download micro-code instructions and non-pipelined graphics functions like context switching.

The interface to the command-fetch-and-decode block 841 consists of a data bus, command bus, and several control signals. Together these buses and signals move packets from the command-fetch-and-decode block 841 to the geometry block 842.

The command-fetch-and-decode block 841 queues up packet data for the geometry block 842, and when a complete packet and command word exist, it signals by raising the Data\_Ready flag. Processed vertices can require multiple packet transfers to transfer an entire vertex, as described further below.

As the geometry block 842 reads a word off of the data bus, \_\_ raises the Acknowledge signal for one cycle. (As only complete packets of 24 words are transferred, the acknowledge signal is high for 12 clocks.) Further, the geometry block 842 attempts to transfer a packet only at pipeline-cycle boundaries, and the minimum pipeline cycle length is 16 machine cycles. The packets consist of 12 data-bus words, W0 through W11, and one command-bus word.

25           The global command word's second and third most significant bits (MSBs) determine how the geometry block 842 processes the packet. The bits are the Passthrough and the Vertex flags. If set (TRUE), the Passthrough flag indicates the packet passes through to the mode-extraction block 843. If clear (FALSE), the flag indicates that the geometry block 842 processes/consumes the packet.

If set, the Vertex flag indicates the packet is a vertex packet. If clear, the flag indicates the packet is a mode packet.

The format of a consumed mode packet is described below. Bit 31 is



- 1 reserved. Bits 30 and 29 are the Passthrough and Vertex flags. Bits 28-25 form an operation code, while bits 24-0 are Immediate data.

The operation code has any of ten values including: General\_Mode, Material, View\_Port\_Parameters, Bump\_State, Light\_Color, Light\_State, Matrix\_Packet  
5 and Reserved. The packet and immediate data corresponding to each of these operation codes is described in turn below.

Auxiliary-ring I/O uses a subset of the consumed mode packet operation codes, including Ring\_Read\_Request, Ring\_Write\_Request and Microcode\_Write. For  
9 these packets, the IMMEDIATE data have fields for logical pipeline stage (4-bits), physical memory (4-bits), and address (10-bits) that account for the worst case in each pipeline stage.

A general mode packet delivers the remainder of the mode bits required by  
13 the geometry block 842.

A material packet delivers material color and state parameters.

A view-port packet contains view port parameters.

A bump packet delivers all parameters that are associated with surface  
17 tangents and bump mapping.

A light-color packet contains specific light color parameters.

A light-state packet contains light model parameters.

A matrix packet delivers matrices for matrix memory. The packet is used  
21 for all texture parameters, user clip planes and all spatial matrices.

1

The format of a processed vertex packet is described below. Bit 31 is reserved. Bits 30 and 29 are the Passthrough and Vertex flags. Bits 28-27 form a vertex size, bits 6-3 form a primitive type, bits 2-1 form a vertex sequence, and bit 0 is an edge flag. Each of these fields is described in turn below.

(Bits 26-7 of a processed-vertex packet are unused.)

The vertex size indicates how many packet exchanges complete the entire vertex transfer: 1, 2 or 3. With vertex size set to 1, the one packet is a full-performance vertex packet that transfers spatial, normal, texture[0] and colors. With vertex size set to 2, each of the two packets is a half-performance vertex packet. The first packet is identical to the full-performance vertex packet. The second packet transfers texture[1], bi-normal and tangent. With vertex size set to 3, each of the three packets is a third-performance vertex packet. The first two packets are identical to the half-performance packets. The third packet transfers texture[2 - 7].<sup>1</sup>

The Primitive Type is a 4-bit field specifying the primitive type formed by the vertex: points, lines, line strips, line loops, triangles, triangle strips, triangle fans, quads, quad strips and polygons.

The Vertex Sequence is a 2-bit field specifying the sequence of the vertex in a primitive: First, Middle, Last or First\_and\_Last. First specifies the first vertex in a primitive, Middle specifies a vertex in the middle, and Last specifies the last vertex in a primitive. First\_and\_Last specifies a single point that is both the first and last vertex in a primitive.

The Edge flag specifies that the polygon edge is a boundary edge if the polygon render mode is FILL. If the polygon render mode is LINE, specifies if the edge is visible. Finally, if the polygon render mode is POINT, it specifies that the point is visible.

0 – Boundary or visible

1 – Non-boundary or invisible

A Size-1 (full-performance) vertex packet delivers a Size-1 vertex in one

---

<sup>1</sup> Actually, there is only one packet ever transferred. Multiple exchanges and multiple transfers can occur per packet, but there is only one packet transferred.

1 transfer.

A Size-2 (half-performance) vertex packet delivers a Size-two vertex in two consecutive transfers. The geometry block 842 reads the command bus only once during this packet. Once the transformation unit 210 starts to process a vertex, it does not pause  
 5 that processing, so the two data transfers occur on consecutive pipeline cycles. (The command-fetch-and-decode block 841 does not assert Data Ready until it can guarantee this.)

The position of the parameters in the packet is fixed with the possible  
 9 exception of texture coordinates. If the tangent generation is enabled ( $TANG\_GEN = 1$ ), then the texture specified for use in tangent generation ( $BUMP\_TXT[2:0]$ ) swaps position in the packet with texture zero.  $BUMP\_TXT$  can only be set to zero or one for size 2 vertices.

13 A Size-3 (third-performance) vertex packet delivers a Size-3 vertex in three consecutive transfers. As with the Size-2 vertex packet, the geometry block 842 reads the command bus only once during this packet. Once the transformation unit 210 starts to process a vertex, it does not pause that processing, so the three data transfers occur on  
 17 consecutive pipeline cycles. (The command-fetch-and-decode block 841 does not assert Data Ready until it can guarantee this.)

The position of the parameters in the packet is fixed with the possible  
 exception of texture coordinates. If the tangent generation is enabled ( $TANG\_GEN = 1$ ),  
 21 then the texture specified for use in tangent generation ( $BUMP\_TXT[2:0]$ ) swaps position in the packet with texture zero.  $BUMP\_TXT$  can only be set to zero or seven for size three vertices.

Propagated Mode packets move up to 16 words of data unaltered through  
 25 the geometry block 842 to the mode-extraction block output bus. A command header is placed on the mode-extraction block bus followed by Length words of data, for a total of  $LENGTH + 1$  words.

The format of a Propagated Mode packet is described below. Bit 31 is  
 29 reserved. Bits 30 and 29 are the Passthrough and Vertex flags. Bits 20-16 form a Length field. (Bits 28-21 and 15-0 are unused.)

Length is a five-bit field specifying the number of (32-bit) words that are in the data portion of the packet. In one embodiment, values range from 0 to 16.

1                   The format of a Propagated Vertex packet is described below. Bit 31 is reserved. Bits 30 and 29 are the Passthrough and Vertex flags. Bits 20-16 form a Length field. (Bits 28-21 and 15-0 are unused.)

                  A Propagated Vertex packet performs like a Propagated Mode packet except  
5   that the geometry block 842 discards the command word as it places the data on the mode-extraction block output bus, for a total of Length words.

                  The geometry pipeline 840 uses the auxiliary ring as an interface for special packets for controlling the geometry block 842 during startup, initialization and context  
9   switching. The packets use consumed mode command words (Passthrough = FALSE; Vertex = FALSE) and thus share the same command word description as the consumed mode command words from the command-fetch-and-decode block 841. The ring  
13   controller in the geometry block 842 has access to the command-fetch-and-decode block 841 data and command bus before it enters the first physical pipeline stage in the transformation sub-unit, so the majority of the geometry block 842 has no knowledge of the source of the packet. The command-fetch-and-decode block 841 gets priority, so (for good or bad) it can lock the ring off the bus.

17               Normal output from the geometry block 842 is to the mode-extraction block 843. Special outputs to the auxiliary ring help effect non-pipelined graphics functions such as context switching.

                  The interface to the mode-extraction block 843 includes a data bus and two  
21   control signals, for example Data Valid. A Data Valid pulse accompanies each valid word of data. The interface hardware controls a queue on the mode-extraction block side. Geometry block 842 is signalled when there are thirty-two entries left to ensure that the current pipeline cycle can finish before the queue is full. Several additional entries  
25   compensate for the signal travel time.

                  The mode-extraction block 843 recognizes the first entry in the queue as a header and decodes it to determine the length of the packet. The block 843 uses this length count to recognize the next header word.

29               There are four types of packets output from the geometry block 842: color vertex, spatial vertex, propagated mode, and propagated vertex. Each of these packets is described in turn below.

                  The color vertex and spatial vertex packets are local packets that are the

1 result of processed vertex input packets. The propagated output packets correspond one for one to the propagated input packets.

A Color Vertex packet contains the properties associated with a vertex's position. Every vertex not removed by back face culling or clipped off by volume clip  
5 planes (trivial reject or multiply planes exclude complete polygon) produces a single vertex color packet. The size of the packet depends on the size of the input vertex packet and the state at the time the packet is received.

A Spatial Vertex packet contains the spatial coordinates and relationships of  
9 a single vertex. Every input vertex packet not removed by back face culling or clipped off by volume clip planes (trivial reject or multiply planes exclude complete polygon) produces a spatial vertex packet corresponding to the exact input vertex coordinates. Additional spatial vertices are formed when a clip plane intersects a polygon or line, and  
13 the polygon or line is not completely rejected.

An output Propagated Mode packet is identical to its corresponding input packet.

An output Propagated Vertex packet contains all of the data of its  
17 corresponding input packet, but its command word has been stripped off. The geometry block 842 does not output the input command word. Nonetheless, the Length field from the command word sets the number of valid words put on the output bus. Thus, LENGTH = data words for Propagated Vertex packets.

21

#### - The Geometry Block

The geometry block 842 functions as a complete block from the perspective of the rest of the blocks in the pipeline 840. Internally, however, the block 842 functions  
25 as a series of independent units.

The transformation unit 210 regulates the inflow of packets to the geometry block 842. In order to achieve the high-latency requirement of the spherical-texture and surface-tangent computations, the block 842 bypasses operands from the output back to its  
29 input across page-swap boundaries. Thus, once a packet (typically, a vertex) starts across the transformation unit 120, it does not pause midway across the unit. A packet advances into the logical pipeline stage A 212 when space exists in the synchronization queues 231 for the entire packet.

1           The lighting unit 220 also bypasses from the functional unit output to input across page-swap boundaries. To facilitate this, are placed at its input and output buffer the lighting unit 220. The queues work together to ensure that the lighting unit 220 is always ready to process data when the transformation unit 210 has data ready.

5           Each record entry in the input queue has a corresponding record entry in the output queue. Thus, the lighting unit 220 has room to process data whenever the transformation unit 210 finds room in the synchronization queue. Packets in the synchronization queues become valid only after the lighting unit 220 writes colors into its  
9 output queue. When the output queue is written, the command synchronization queue is also written.

          The clipping unit 230 waits until there is a valid packet in the synchronization queues. When a packet is valid, the clipping unit 230 moves the packet  
13 into the primitive-formation queues 231. The output of the geometry block 842 is a simple double buffer.

          The internal units 210, 220, 230 are physical pipeline stages. Each physical pipeline stage has its own independent control mechanism that is synchronized to the rest  
17 of the block 842 only on pipeline-stage intervals.

          The clipping unit 230 has some rather unique constraints that cause it to stop and start much more erratically than the remainder of the block b842.

          At system reset, the pipeline is empty. All of the Full signals are cleared,  
21 and the programmable pipeline-cycle counter in the unit controller begins to count down. When the counter decrements past zero, the Advance\_Pipeline signal is generated and distributed to all of the pipeline-stage controllers. The counter is reset to the programmed value.

25           If there is a valid request to the geometry block 842 pending, a packet enters the top of the pipeline from either the command-fetch-and-decode block 841 or the auxiliary ring. (The auxiliary-ring command unit has priority, enabling it to lock out command-fetch-and-decode block auxiliary-ring command requests.)

29           During the next pipeline cycle, the unit controller analyzes the packet request and prepares the packet for processing by the pipeline stages. This can be a multi-pipeline-cycle process for data coming from the auxiliary ring. (The command-fetch-and-decode block 841 does some of the preparation for the geometry block

1 842, so this is not the case for requests from the block 841). Further, some packets from  
the command-fetch-and-decode block 841 are multi-pipeline-cycle packets. The  
command-fetch-and-decode block 841 does not send a request to the geometry block 841 to  
process these packets until the block 841 has the complete packet ready to send.

5 When the pipeline-cycle counter again rolls over and the Advance\_Pipeline  
signal is distributed, the unit controller analyzes its Pipeline\_Full input. If the signal is  
clear, the controller resets the Hold input of the pipeline-stage-A command register to  
advance the packet to the next stage. Stage A 212 detects the new packet and begins  
9 processing.

Stage A 212 could require more than one pipeline cycle to process the  
packet, depending on the type of packet it is and the state that is set in the stage. If more  
than one pipeline cycle is required, the stage raises the Pipeline\_Full signal. If  
13 Pipeline\_Full is raised, the unit controller is not allowed to advance the next packet down  
the pipe. When the stage detects that the packet will complete in the current stage, the  
Pipeline\_Full signal is cleared, and just as the unit controller advanced the command  
register of stage A, stage A advances the command register of stage B.

17 As the pipeline fills, the decision-making process for each stage can get  
more complicated. Since each stage has a different set of operations to perform on any  
given vertex, some sets of operations can take longer than others. This is particularly true  
as more complex states are set in the individual pipeline stages. Further, some of the  
21 packets in the pipeline can be mode changes rather than vertices. This can alter the way  
the previous vertex and the next vertex are handled even in an individual pipeline stage.

A unit controller regulates the input of data to the geometry pipeline 842.  
Commands come from two sources: the auxiliary ring and the command-fetch-and-decode  
25 block 841. Auxiliary-ring memory requests are transferred by exception and do not happen  
during normal operation. The controller decodes the commands and generates a command  
word. The command word contains information about the packet that determines what the  
starting instruction is in the next pipeline stage. Further, the unit controller also manages  
29 the interface between the command-fetch-and-decode and geometry blocks 841, 842.

The auxiliary-ring commands are either instruction-memory packets (write)  
or data-memory (read) packets to the various pipeline stages. The read feature reads  
stipple patterns during context switching, but the read mechanism is generic enough that

1 most memory locations can be read.

The command-fetch-and-decode block commands are of two types:  
propagated mode (propagated or consumed), or vertex.

5 The pipeline-stage controllers for each stage are all variations on the same  
basic design. The controllers are as versatile as possible in order to compensate for  
hardware bugs and changing algorithms. In one embodiment, they are implemented as  
programmable micro-code. In fact, all state in the controllers is programmable in some  
way.

9 The pipeline-stage control begins with the previous stage (i - 1) placing a  
new command in the command register. The instruction control state machine checks for  
this event when the Advance\_Pipeline signal is pulsed.

Programmable microcode instruction memory drives the geometry block  
13 842. Each physical stage has a dedicated instruction memory. Since each physical stage  
has slightly different data-path elements, the operation codes for each physical stage are  
slightly different.

#### - The Pipe Stage A

17 The logical pipeline stage A 212 primarily transforms vertices with 4-by-4  
matrices. Accordingly, its instruction set is comparatively small. In order to add more  
utility to the unit, a condition code with each matrix-multiplication operation specifies how  
the result of the operation is used.

21 The instruction memory 1230 is divided into pages of instructions. Each  
page contains a "pipeline cycle" worth of operations. The command register 12A0 drives  
the page selection. The decode logic uses the command and the current mode to select the  
appropriate jump table address for the current state.

25 The jump table contains an instruction memory address and page mode.  
(Page mode is mode that is valid only for the current pipeline cycle.) The  
instruction-memory address points to the first valid instruction for the current page. All  
instructions issue in one cycle. Thus, this initial address is incremented continuously for  
29 the duration of the pipeline cycle.

The Advance\_Pipeline signal 211H tells the GCW controller 1210 to  
evaluate the state of the current command to determine if it has completed. If it is  
complete, the controller 1210 removes the hold from the command register 12A0 and a



1 new command enters the pipeline stage.

The command register 12A0 is a hold register for storing the geometry command word. The command word consists of the unaltered command bus data and a valid bit (V) appended as the MSB.

5 The decoder 1220 is combinatorial logic block that converts the operation-code field of the command word and the current mode into an address for referencing the jump-table memory 1230. The decoder 1220 also generates texture pointers and matrix pointers for the texture state machine 1260, as well as new mode  
9 enable flags for the write-enable memory 1280.

The remainder of the state (not in the texture state machine) is also in the instruction controller 2126. In particular, TANG\_GEN and TANG\_TRNS are stored here. These registers are cleared at reset and set by a Bump\_State packet.

13 The hardware jump table is used during reset and startup before the programmable memories have valid data.

The write-enable memory 1280 stores the write-enable bits associated with each of the matrices stored in the matrix memory 2125. An enable bit exists for each of the  
17 data paths for the four functional unit 2122. The operand A address bits [6:2] select the read address to this memory 1280.

Matrix multiply and move instructions can access the write-enable memory 1280. The write enables enable word writes to the vertex buffers BC 2123 and to enable  
21 sign-bit writes to the geometry command word.

The memory is filled by Matrix packets in the geometry command word. The packet header (command) contains both the write address and the four enable bits.

The instruction field merge logic 1290 is a primarily combinatorial logic that  
25 selects which signals control which data-path components. The hardware instruction memory 1270 selects the hardwired or software instructions. Some of the fields that make up the software instruction word are multiplexed.

The texture state machine selects mode of the data-path control fields.

29 The hardware instruction memory 1250 controls the data path at the startup before the micro-code memory has been initialized.

The geometry command word controller 1210 implements the sequencing of stage A 212. The Advance\_Pipeline signal 211H from the global packet controller 211

- 1 triggers the evaluation of the exit code. (The exit codes are programmable in the jump-table memory 1240.)

The possible exit codes are TRUE, FALSE, and TSM\_CONDITIONAL.

- 5 TSM\_CONDITIONAL allows the TSM\_Done signal to determine if the current instruction page completes the current packet. If the condition is TRUE, then the next Advance\_Pipeline strobe releases the hold on the command register, and a new command enters the pipe.

- 9 A duration counter track the time a vertex is in the stage 212. The writing of a new command to the command register 12A0 clears the counter.

- The texture state machine 1260 determines the requirements and tracks the state of each of the eight textures and the two user-defined clip-plane sets. The state machine 1260 prioritizes requirements based on the size of the vertex and the current duration. The vertex size limits the maximum texture number for the current vertex. The current duration limits the maximum texture number for the current pipeline cycle.

- 13 The state machine 1260 prioritizes in this order: generation, clipping sets, transformations. If textures are not generated, they are moved to the vertex buffer BC. The move operations use the complement of the four-bit generation write-enable mask associated with each texture. This ensures that all enabled textures propagate to the vertex buffer BC.

- 21 When micro-coded texture instructions are issued, the state machine 1260 provides the instruction word. When the addresses are used, the state machine 1260 marks that operation as complete and moves on to the next requirement.

- 25 The Pipeline Stages Preferably interleaved pipeline stages are used in the preseln invention, e.g., combined single stage BC, although other configurations could instead be used.

#### -- The Scratch-Pad Memory

- 29 Single logical pipelinestage BC is used to temporarily store data associated with the current vertex in the scratch-pad memory 2132. Logical stage Bc can also store in the memory 2132 current mode information used in the data-path calculations — view-port transformation parameters and bump-scale parameters, for example. Finally, the logical stages B and C store in the memory 2132 the values previous two vertices of the eye,

1 texture, and window coordinates.

Current vertex data preferably are divided into logical stage BC, which can act as though it were a double-buffer section. A new vertex packet switches the buffer pointer, so data computed in stage B can be used in stage C, such that BC may be treated as  
5 a single stage.

The previous vertex data is broken into logical M1 and M2 double-buffer sections. The buffer pointer also switches as a new vertex packet propagates down the pipeline. (This is distinct from the "first" and "second" vertex notation dependant on the  
9 current geometry and vertex order.)

#### -- The Vertex Buffers BC

The vertex buffers BC 2123 stage the vertex data through the math  
13 functional units 2133. The vertex buffers BC 2123 serve as a triple buffer between stages A, and BC, where stage A accesses the write side (W) of the buffer, stage B accesses one of the read buffers (R0), and stage C accesses the second read buffer (R1). As a new vertex (SN=1) propagates down the pipeline, it receives additional buffer pointers in the  
17 order W, R0, R1. That given vertex retains possession of each of the pointers until either a second vertex or mode packet follows.

#### -- The Math Functional Units

21 The math functional units 2123 in this stage are mathFunc\_F32. There are two, and each can execute independent instructions each cycle.

1 Where the math-functional-unit operation codes are as follows:

	<b>MNEMONIC</b>	<b>FUNCTION</b>
	MUL	$R = A * B$
	NMUL	$R = -(A * B)$
5	ACC	$R = A * B + acc$
	NACC	$R = -(A * B) + acc$
	RCPMUL	$R = A * B + rom$
	RSQTMUL	$R = A * B + rom$
9	RCP	$A = D, B = U$
	RSQT	$A = D, B = U$

a dot-product sequence is simply MUL, ACC, ACC. The reciprocal sequence is RCP,  
 13 RCPMUL. Likewise, the reciprocal-square-root sequence is RSQT, RSQTMUL.

Since neither data conversion or de-normal numbers are required, forcing  
 the MSB of both mantissas to 1 sets the Implied bit. The output MSB of the mantissa can  
 also be ignored. The overflow and underflow bits preferably go to an error register.

17

#### -- Instruction Control

Controller 1800 controls two instructions streams used by logical stage BC,  
 which stage time-shares control of the data path. It will be appreciated that some  
 21 duplication may be required, e.g., for command words registers 1810) to enable  
 co-existence of virtual pipeline stages within a common physical stage.

#### --- The Command Register

25 Simple hold registers 1810 store the geometry command word. Each  
 consists of the unaltered command bus data and control bits made by the previous stage.

Stage B and C each have a copy of the command register. Stage B adds  
 comparison bits for determining which view-volume planes were cut by the current  
 29 geometry.

#### --- The Decoder

The decoder 1830 is combinatorial logic that converts the operation-code

- 1 field of the command word and the current mode into an address for referencing the  
jump-table memory 1840. The write-enable register 1890 stores write-enable pointers,  
write-enable bits and mode write-enable strobes.

All components in the decoder are time-shared.

5

--- The Hardware Jump Table

The hardware jump table 1850 is used during reset and startup before the  
programmable memories have valid data.

- 9 All components in the hardware jump table are time shared. There is no  
duplication related to the interleaved stages.

---The Write-Enable Register

- 13 The write-enable register 1890 stores the write-enable bits for  
conditional-write instructions.

Each stage has its own unique enable register. The jump table 1850 can be  
programmed to pass the B register to the C register at any pipeline-cycle boundary.

17

--- The Field-Merge Logic

- The instruction field merge logic 1880 is a combinatorial block that selects  
the signals controlling the data-path components. The hardware instruction memory 1870  
21 selects the hardwired or the software instructions. Some of the fields that make up the  
software instruction word are multiplexed.

The instruction field merge logic 1880 implements the selection of data for  
the conditional-write instructions.

25

--- The Hardware Instruction Memory

The hardware instruction memory 1870 controls the data path at startup  
before the micro-code memory has been initialized.

29

- The Clipping Unit

The clipping unit 230 is the back end of the geometry block 842. Vertex  
packets going into the clipping unit 232 have all of their data computed in the

1 transformation and lighting units 210, 220. The lighting unit 220 computes vertices' color while the transformation unit 210 supplies the remaining data. The units 210, 220 write data into several synchronization queues where they are synchronized on entering the clipping unit 232.

5 The clipping unit 230 is divided into two functional parts: clipping and format sub-units 232, 233. The clipping sub-unit 232 collects vertices, forms primitives, clips primitives and outputs results. The format sub-unit 233 reformats the data from the clipping sub-unit 232 to the desired form and sends the packets out to the mode-extraction  
9 block 843 through an output queue 234.

The clipping sub-unit 232 breaks the input geometry into either point, line or triangle-type primitives, clips the resulting primitives against both user-defined clip planes and the view volume planes and sends the clipped primitives to the format sub-unit  
13 233.

Vertex packets pass through clipping sub-unit in three pipeline stages: K, L and M. In stage K, the primitive formation queues 2321, 2322, 2324 store vertex data. Concurrently, primitive formation occurs. If a primitive is formed, the stage K passes on  
17 the new primitive to stage L for clipping.

Stage L checks the new primitive for the trivially-accept-or-reject condition. When clipping is necessary, executes microcode to perform the clipping algorithm, as described herein.

21 After the clipping algorithm completes, the control for stage L moves the clipped result out to stage M.

Stage M extracts the clipped and original primitives and sends them to the format sub-unit 233.

25 (The depths of header queues to stage L and M are chosen to ensure that the clipping sub-unit 232 does not insert bubbles into the pipeline due to lack of header space. The worst scenario in which a bubble insertion may occur is the processing of trivially accepted geometries.)

29 The data path of the clipping sub-unit 232 has a 32-bit floating-point math unit 2325 that carries out all the calculations involved in clipping a primitive.

The four memory blocks (the scratch pad GPR 2322 and the primitive, texture and color queues 2321, 2323, 2324. The primitive-queue memory block 2321 and

1 the scratch-pad GPR 2322 support primitive clipping by storing temporary data and new  
vertices data. The texture- and color-queue memory blocks 2323, 2324 accumulate  
vertices data for forming primitive and smoothing out variation in latency.

The owner of the scratch-pad GPR 2322 is always stage L. The three  
5 stages, K, L and M share ownership of the read and write ports of the other three memory  
blocks 2321, 2323, 2324. "Ownership" means that the stage "owning" the port provides  
all the necessary address and control signals.

Specifically, stages K and L share ownership of the write port of the  
9 primitive queue 2321. Stage K uses this write port to transfer spatial data into the primitive  
queue 2321. Stage K has lower ownership priority compared to stage L, but because stage  
L and K runs independent of each other, stage L has to provide enough bandwidth for stage  
K to complete the data transfer in any one pipeline stage.

13 There are two shared ownerships between stage L and M. Stage M can own  
Read Port 1 (the second output, or the port on the right) of the primitive queue 2321, but it  
has the lower priority than stage L. Stage M uses this second port to read out the data of  
new vertices of the clipped primitive. While stage L minimizes its use of the second output  
17 port, there are potentially cases when stage M may not have enough bandwidth. Hardware  
hooks deal with this scenario.

The second shared ownership between stages L and M are on the read ports  
of the texture and color queues 2323, 2324. In this case, stage M has the highest priority in  
21 using a read port. If stage L needs to access data in one of these two queues 2323, 2324, it  
makes sure that stage M is not using the port. Otherwise, stage L waits for the next pipeline  
stage and repeats.

This scheme puts stage L at a disadvantage. However, stage L reads from  
25 one of the ports for interpolation only, and the interpolation performance is acceptably low.

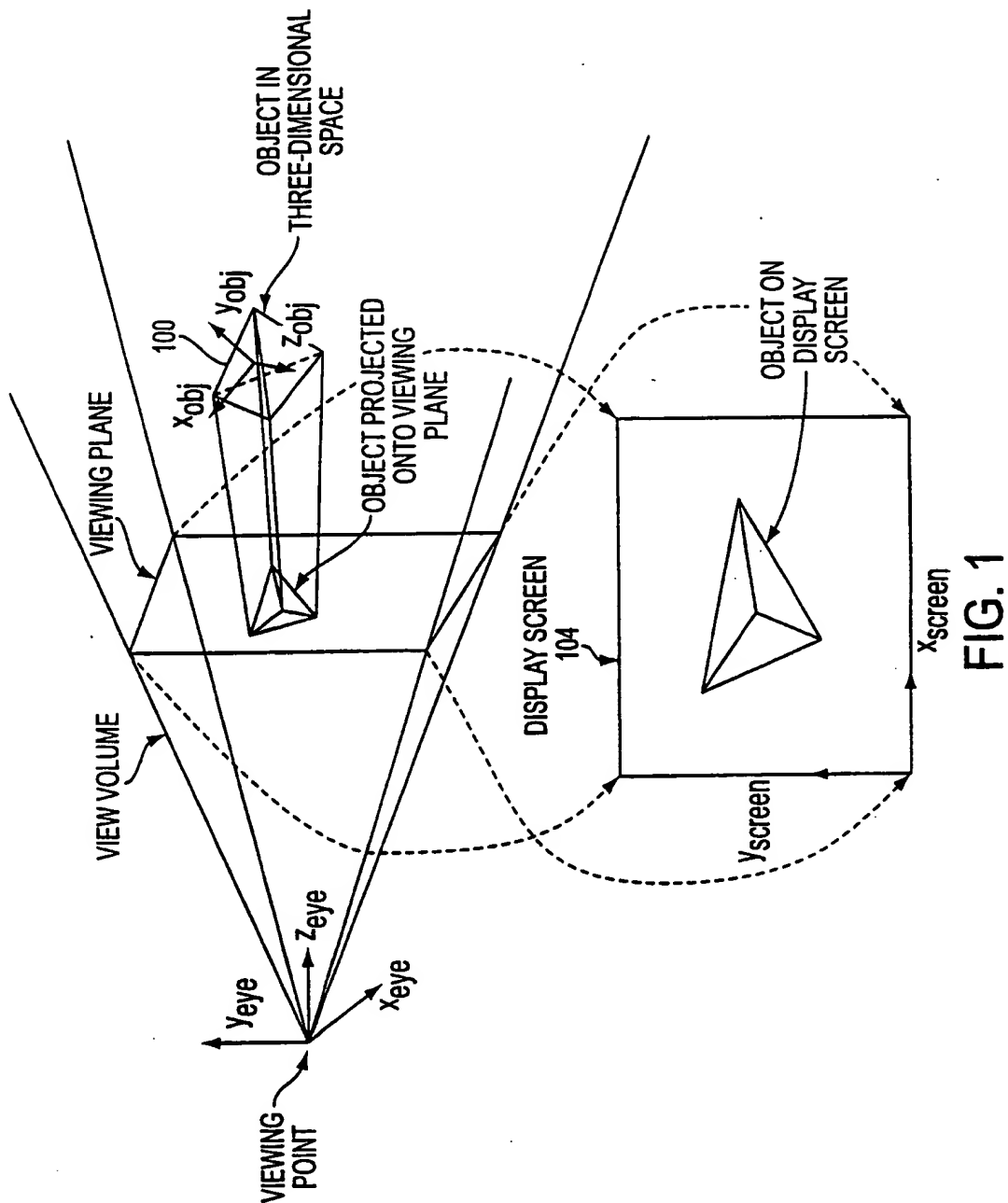
The invention now being fully described, many changes and modifications  
that can be made thereto without departing from the spirit or scope of the appended claims  
29 will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art.

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for implementating at least one geometry operation in a 3D-graphics pipeline, as disclosed herein."
2. The system of claim 1, wherein said system includes:
  - a transformation unit comprising
    - a co-extensive logical and physical stage; and
    - a physical stage including multiple logical stages;
  - a lighting unit, receiving input from said transformation unit; and
  - a clipping unit, receiving input from said transformation and lighting units.
3. The system of claim 2, wherein said physical stage comprises multiple logical stages that interleave their execution.
4. A method for implementing at least one geometry operation in a 3D-graphics pipeline, as disclosed herein.



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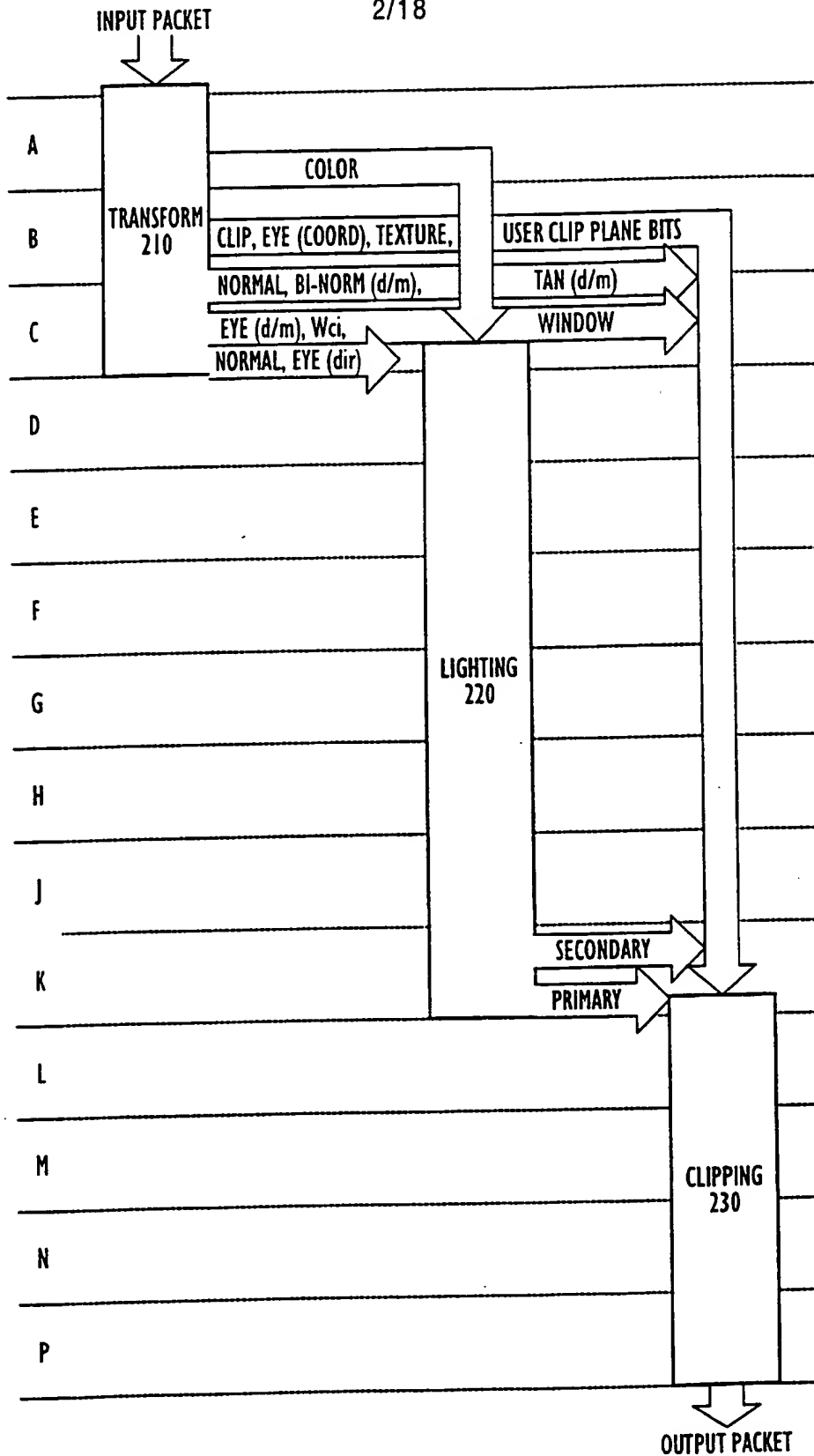


FIG. 2

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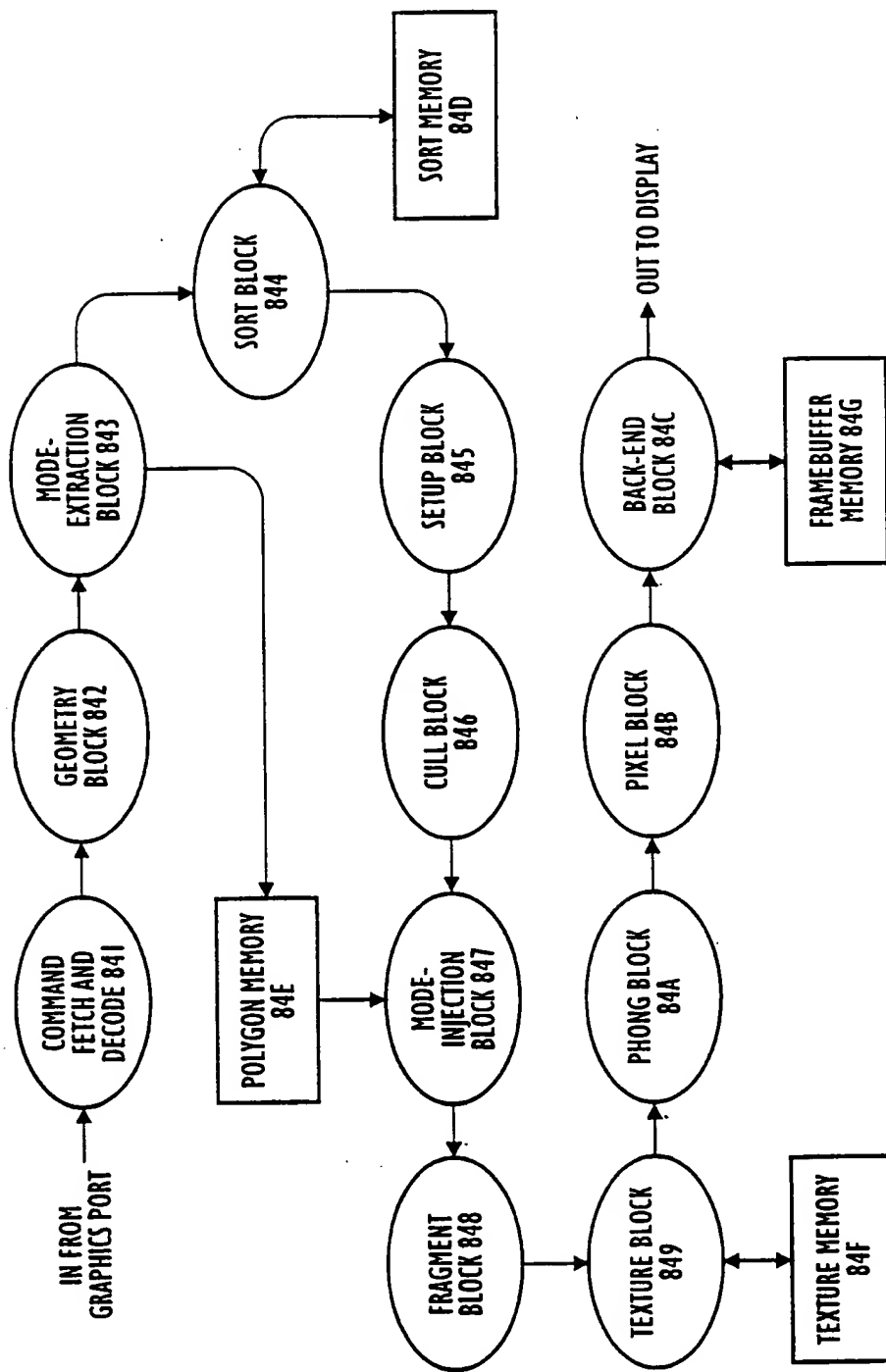


FIG. 3

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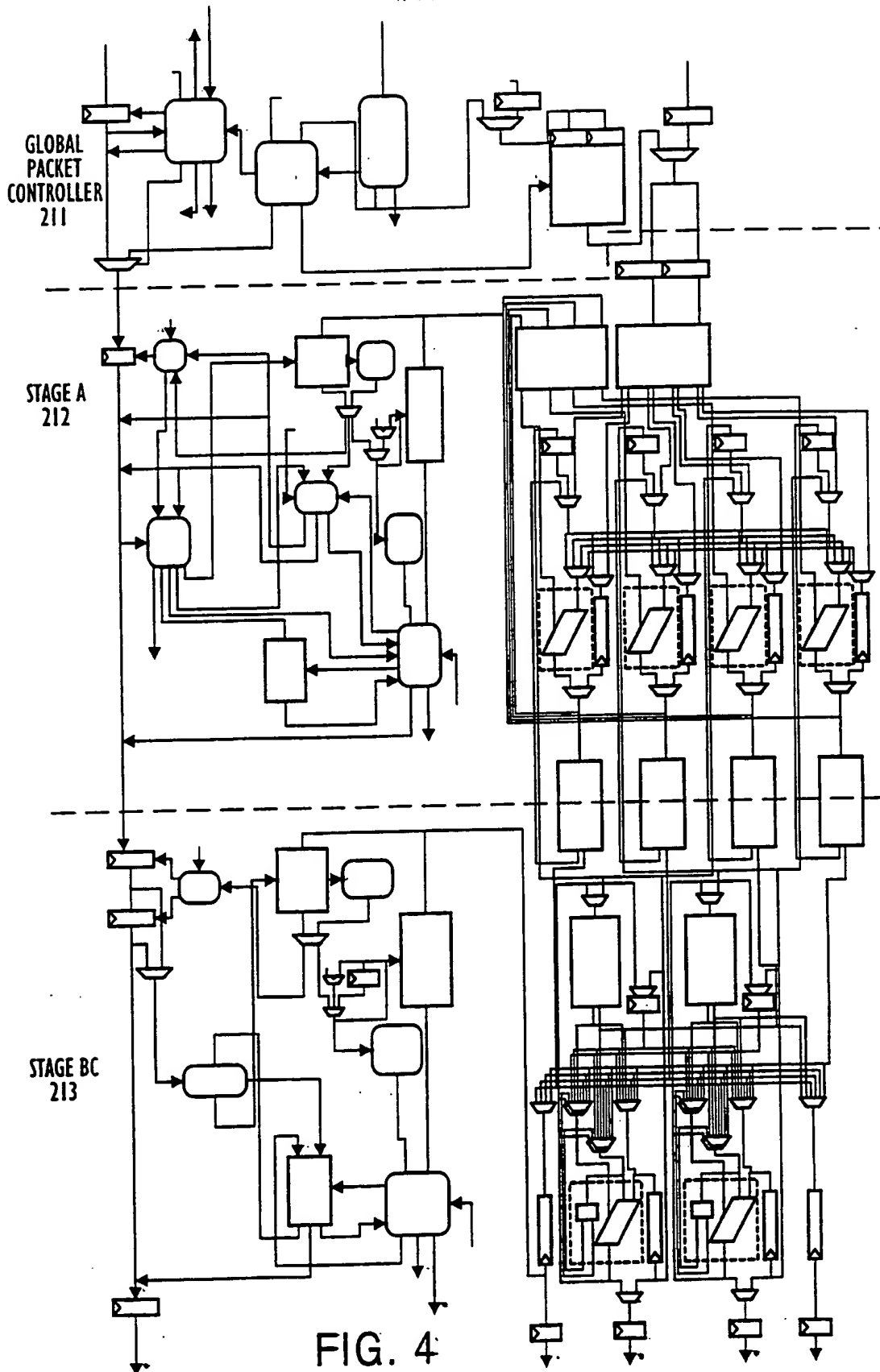


FIG. 4

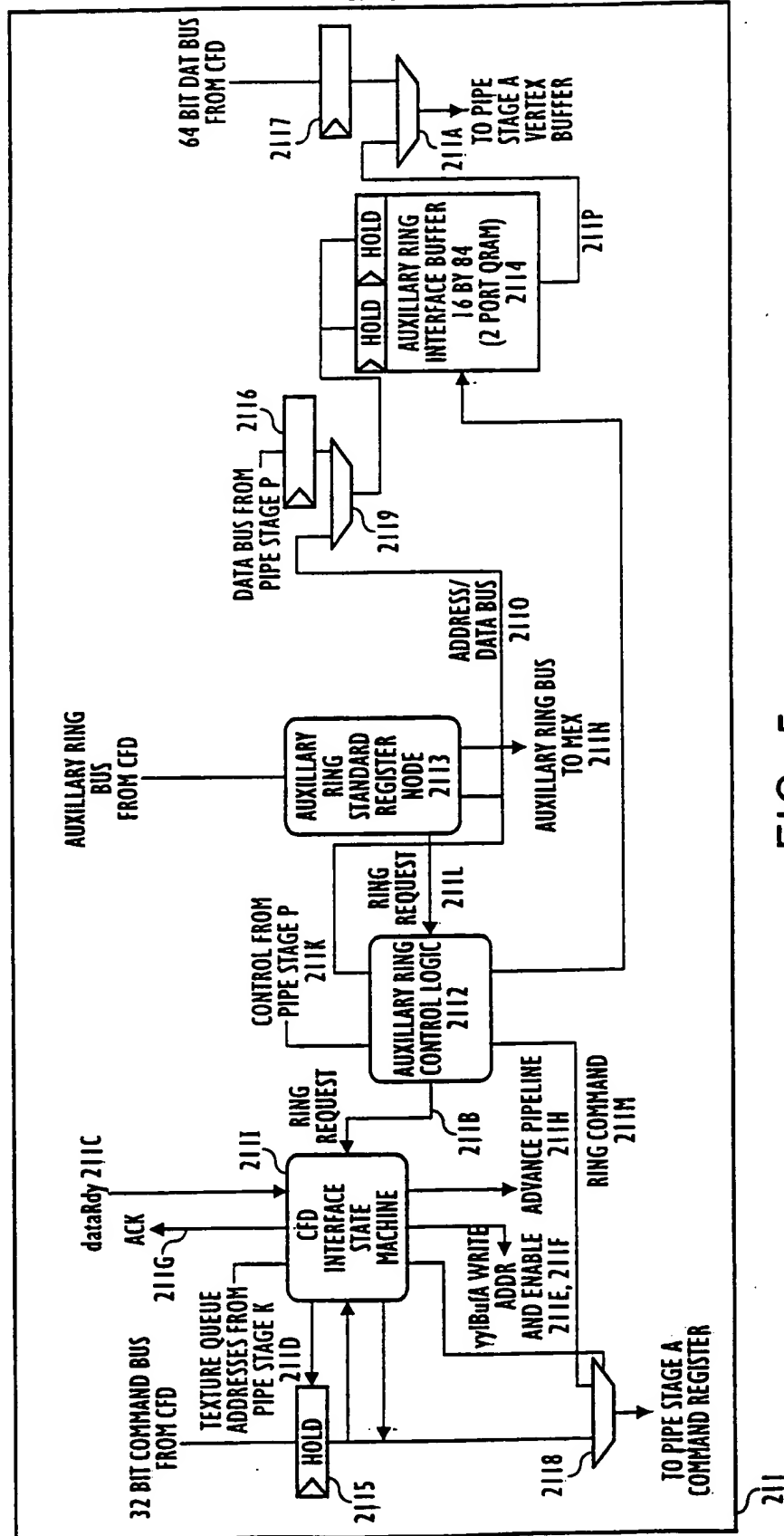


FIG. 5

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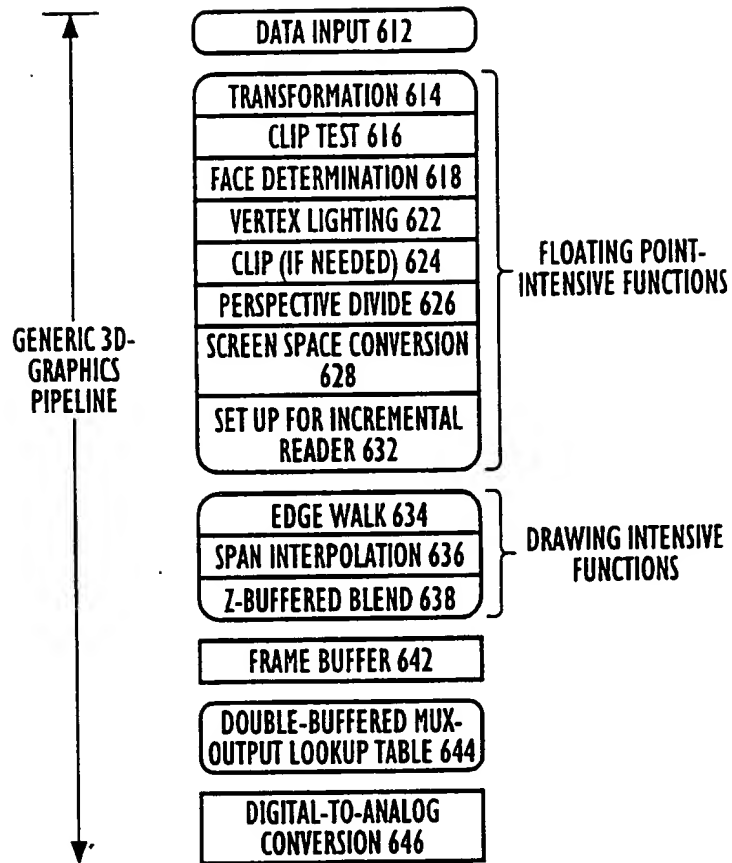


FIG. 6

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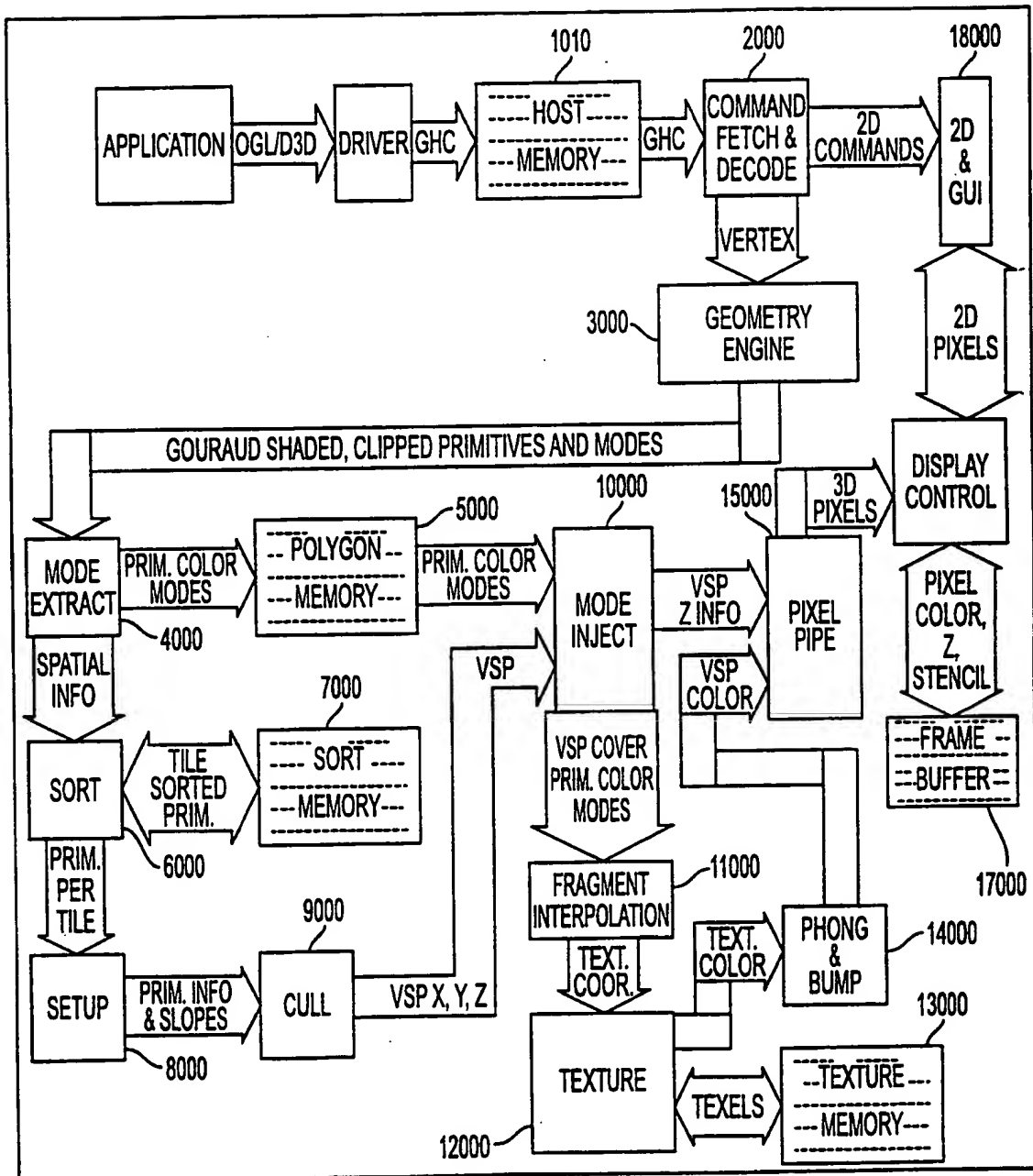


FIG. 7

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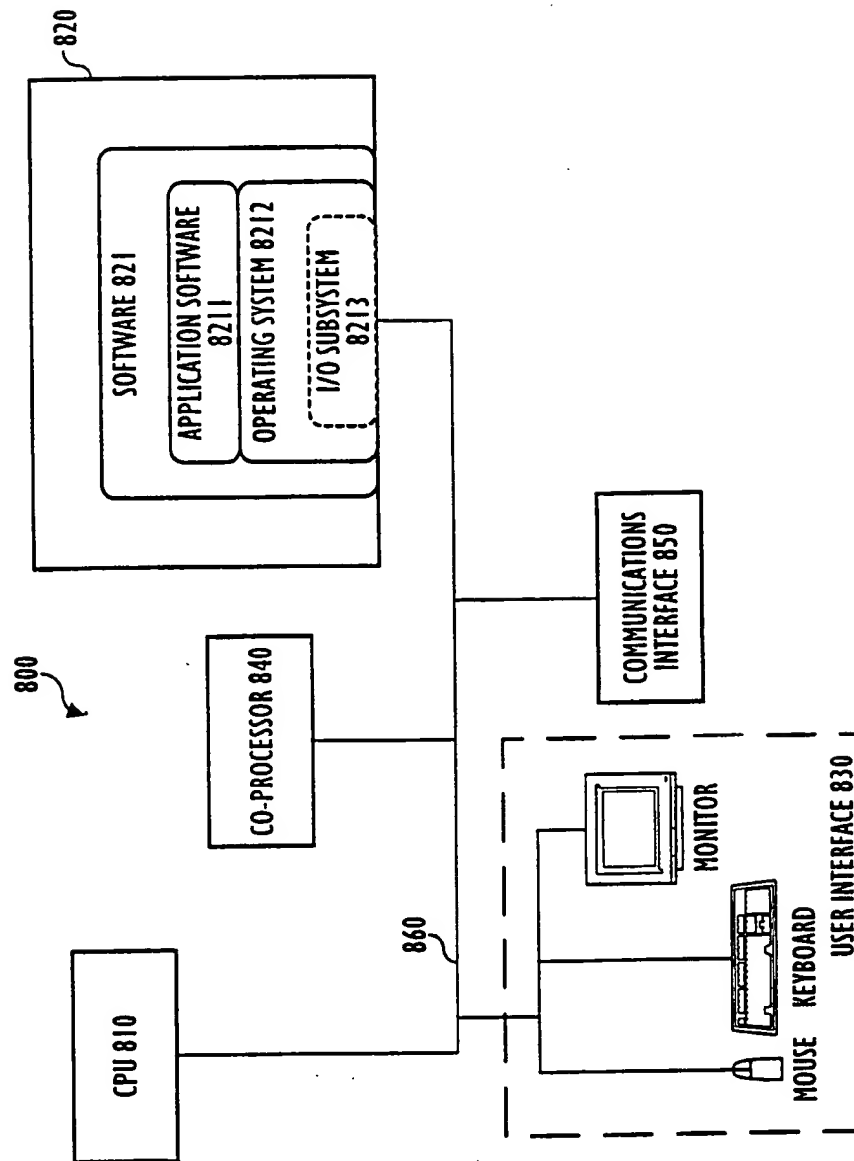
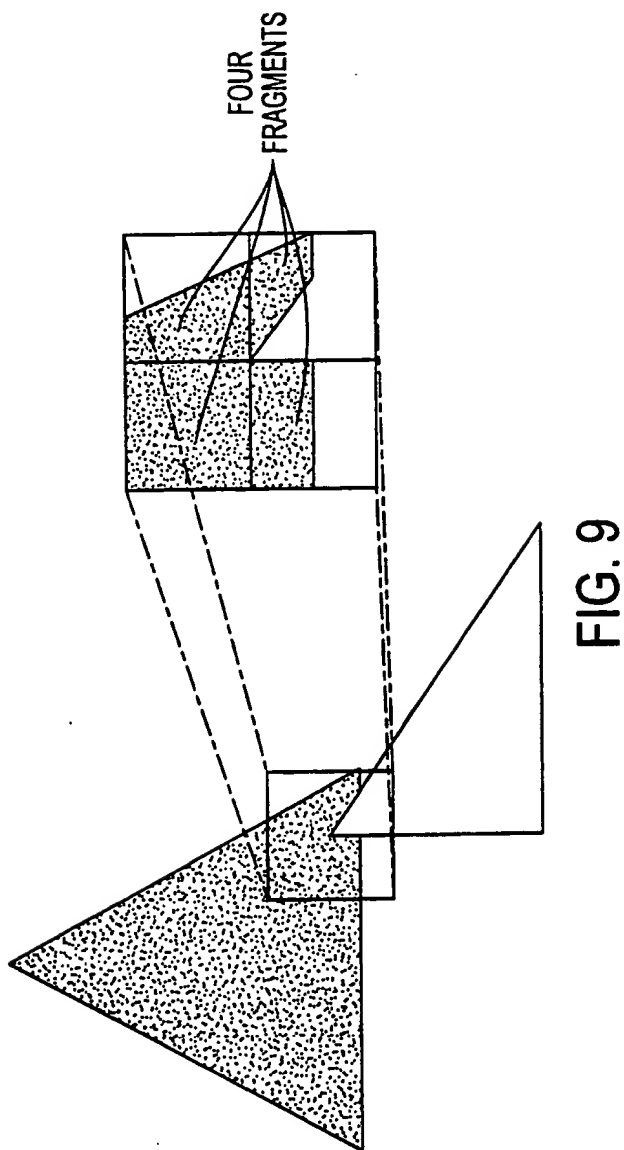


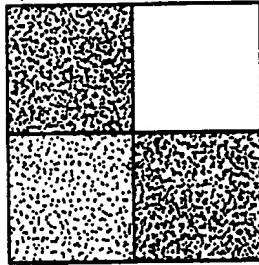
FIG. 8



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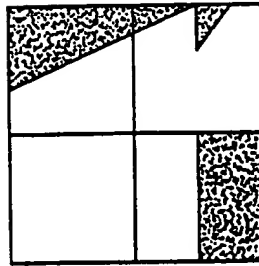


10/18



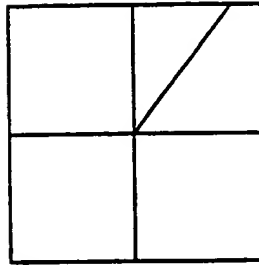
FILLED  
PIXELS

FIG. 10D



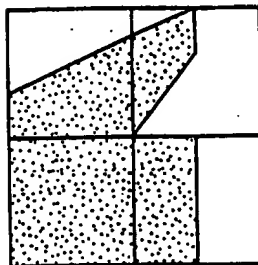
BLACK  
BACKGROUND

FIG. 10C



WHITE  
FRAGMENT

FIG. 10B



GRAY  
FRAGMENTS

FIG. 10A

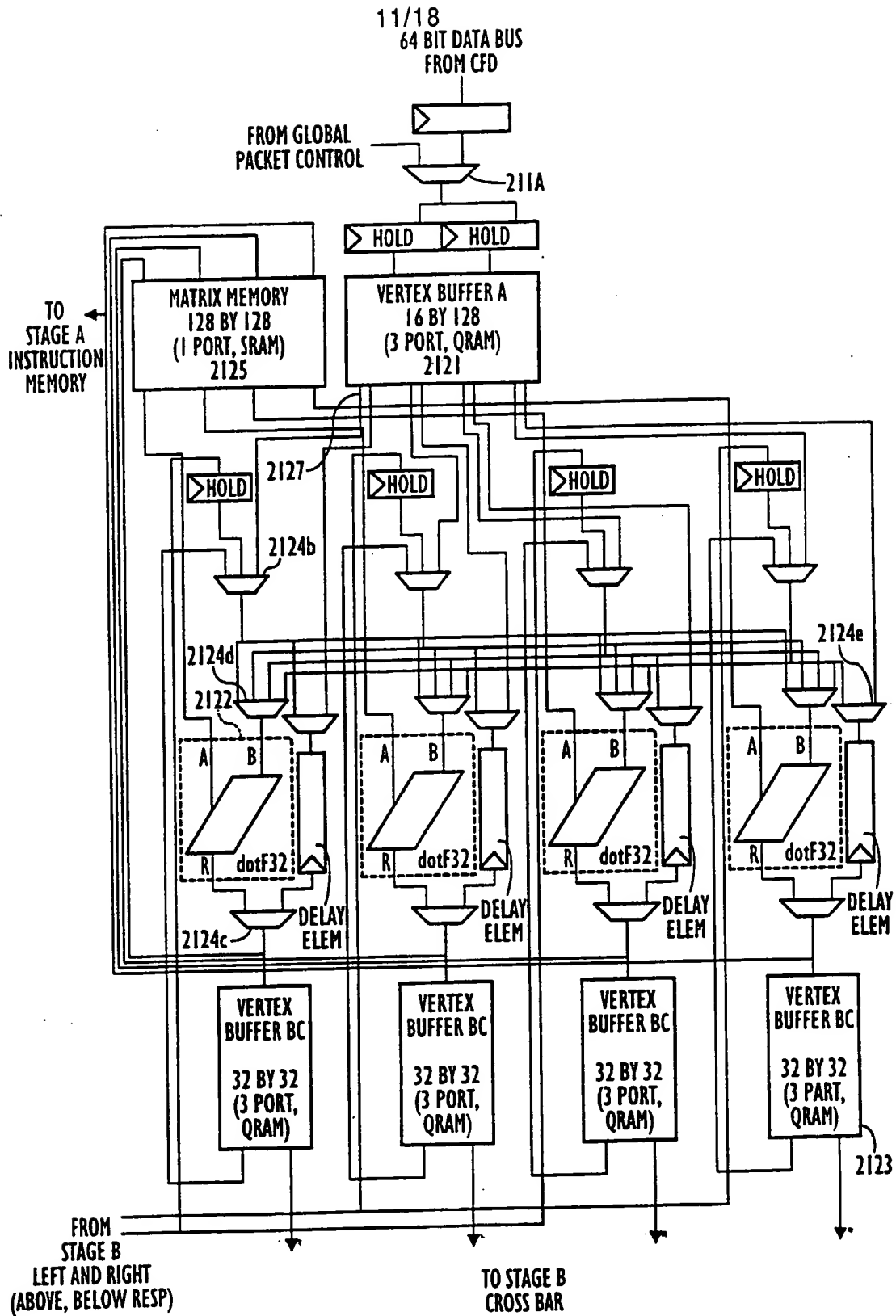
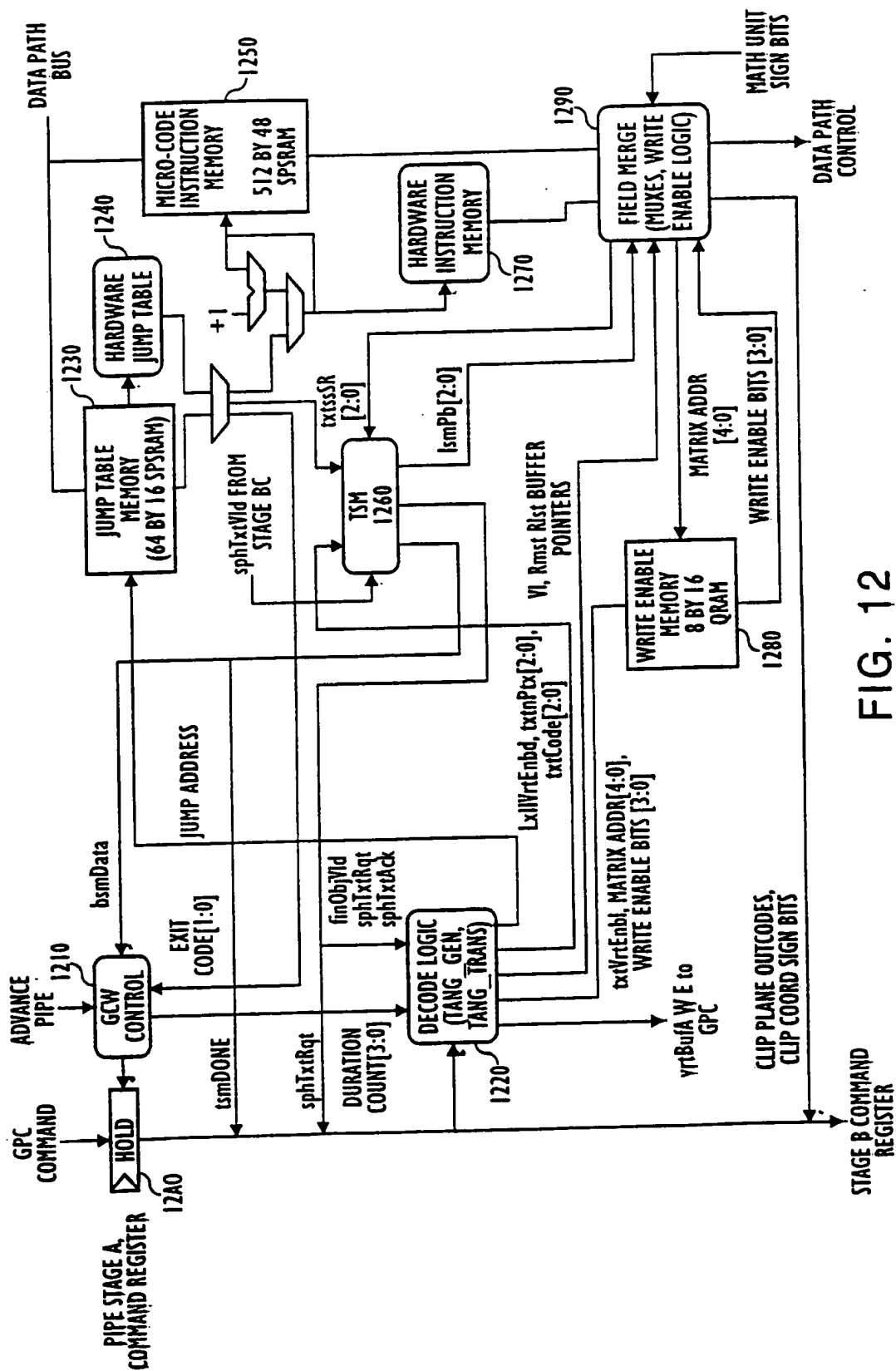


FIG. 11

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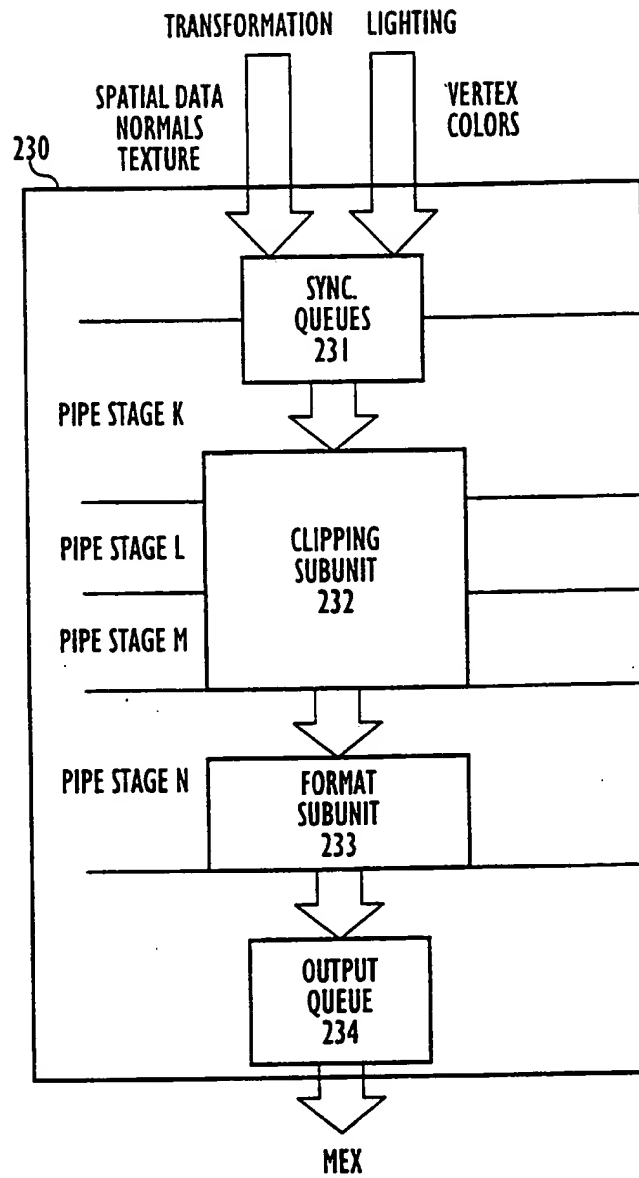


FIG. 13

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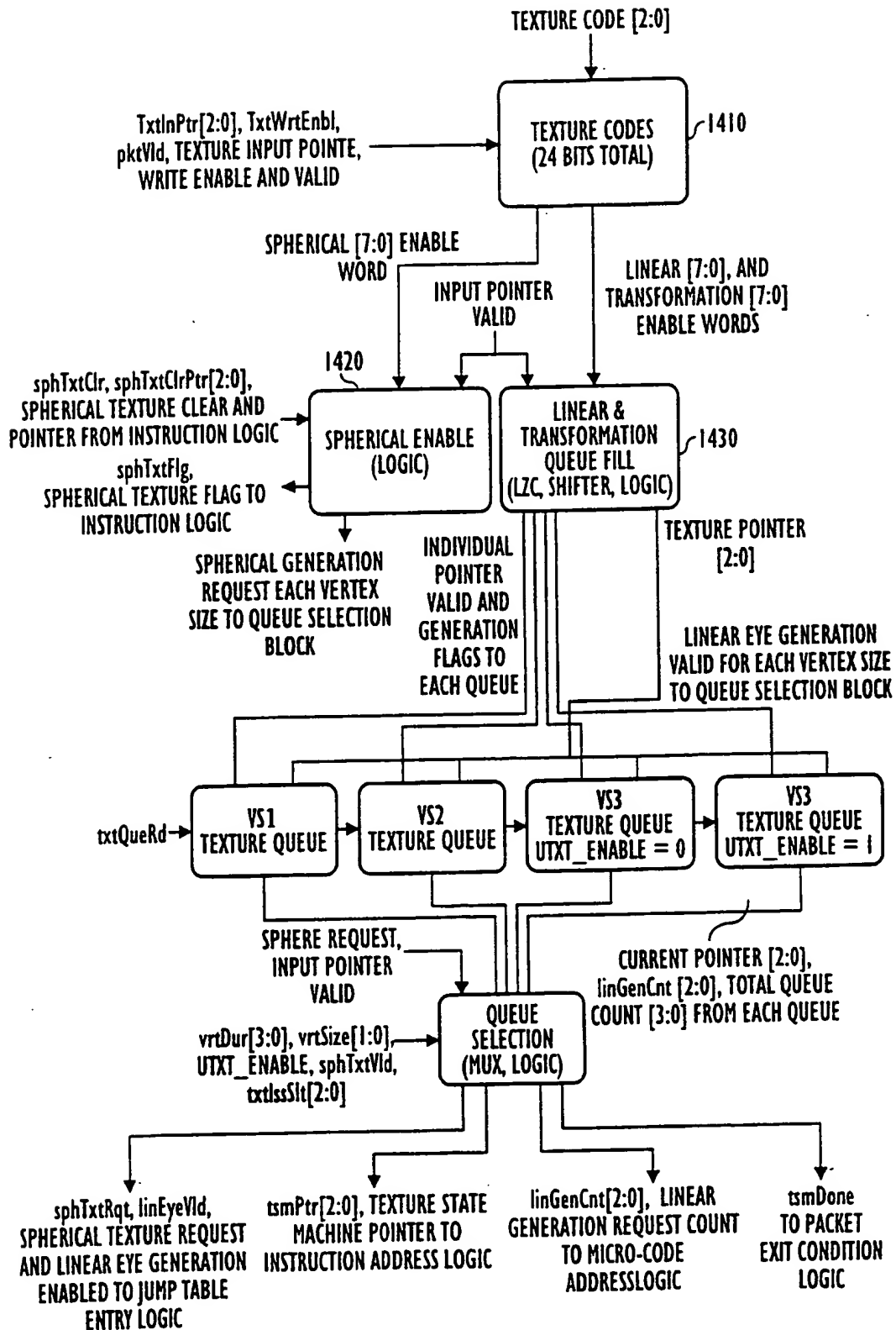


FIG. 14

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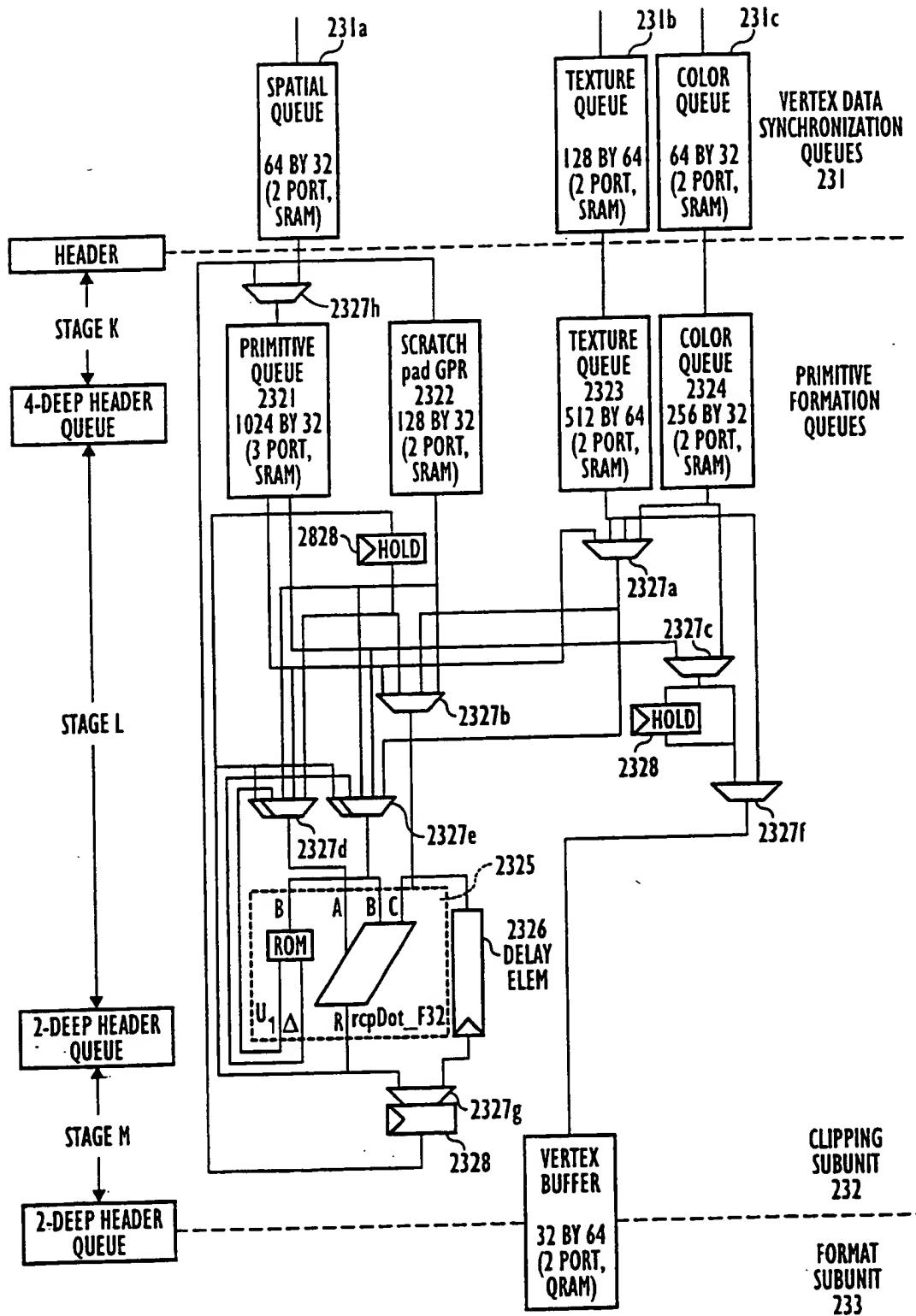


FIG. 15

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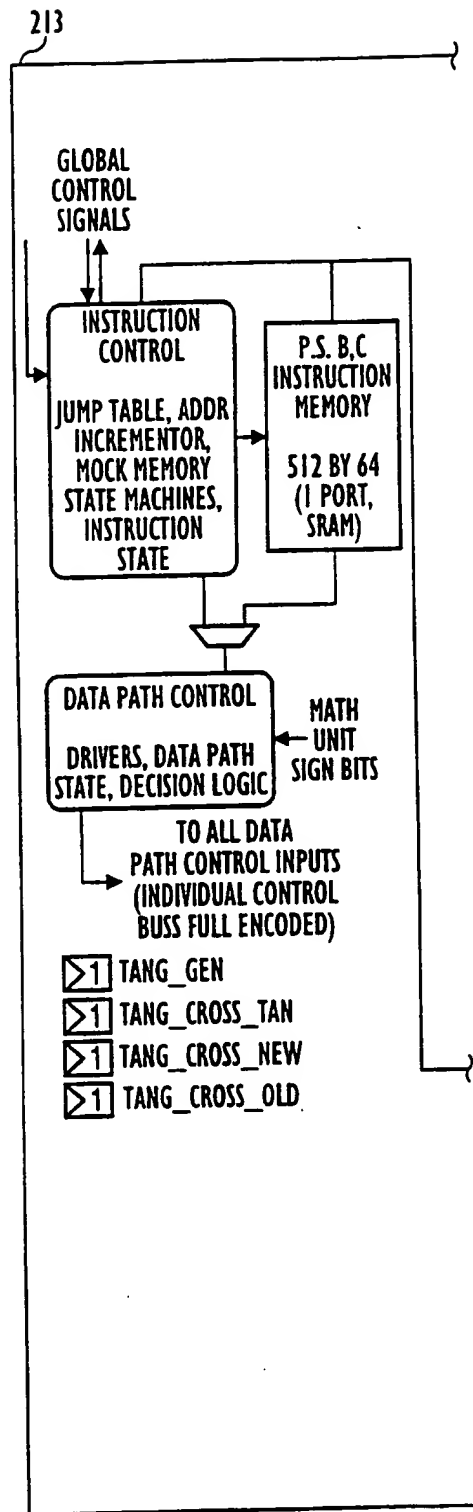


FIG. 16A



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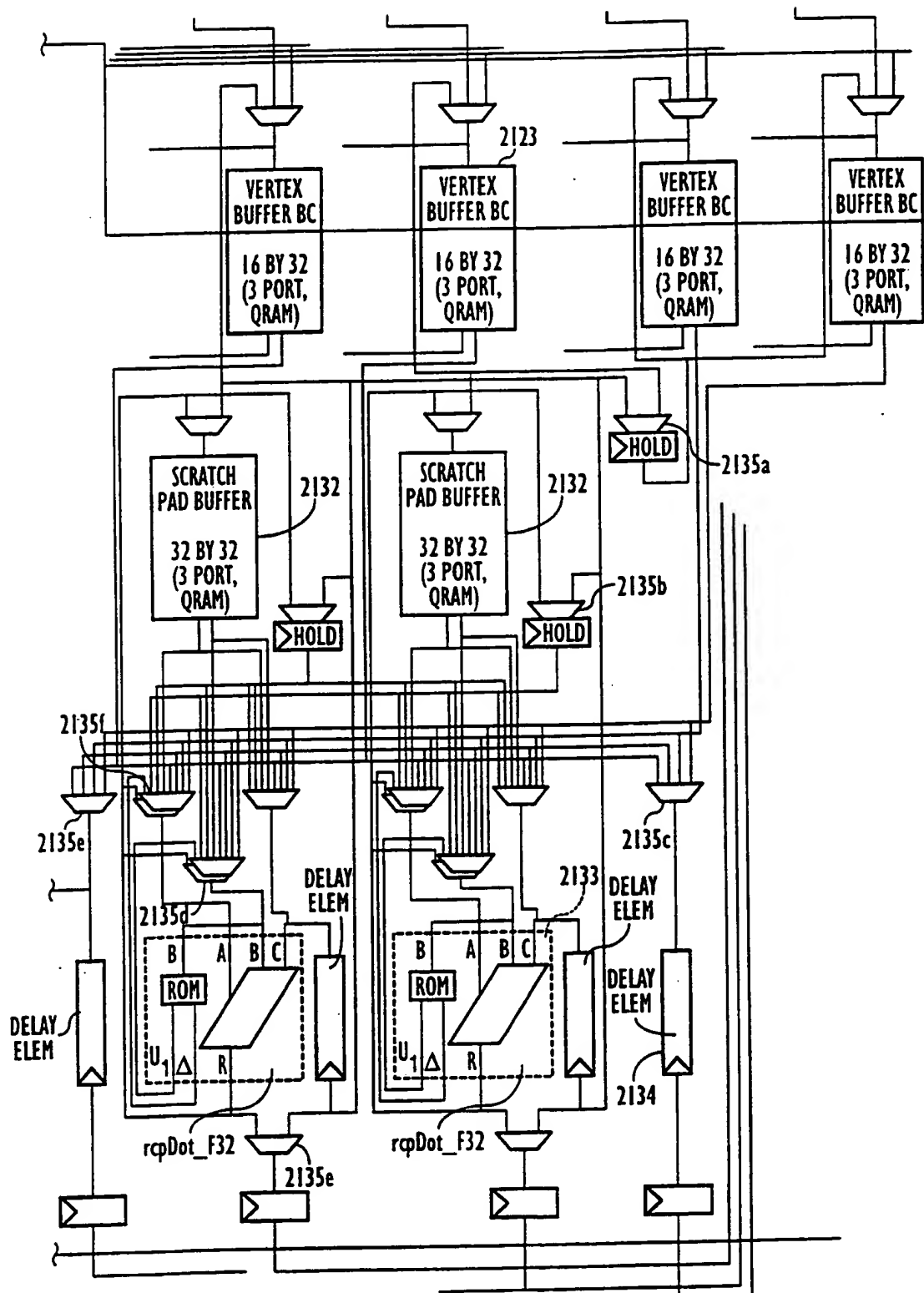


FIG. 16B

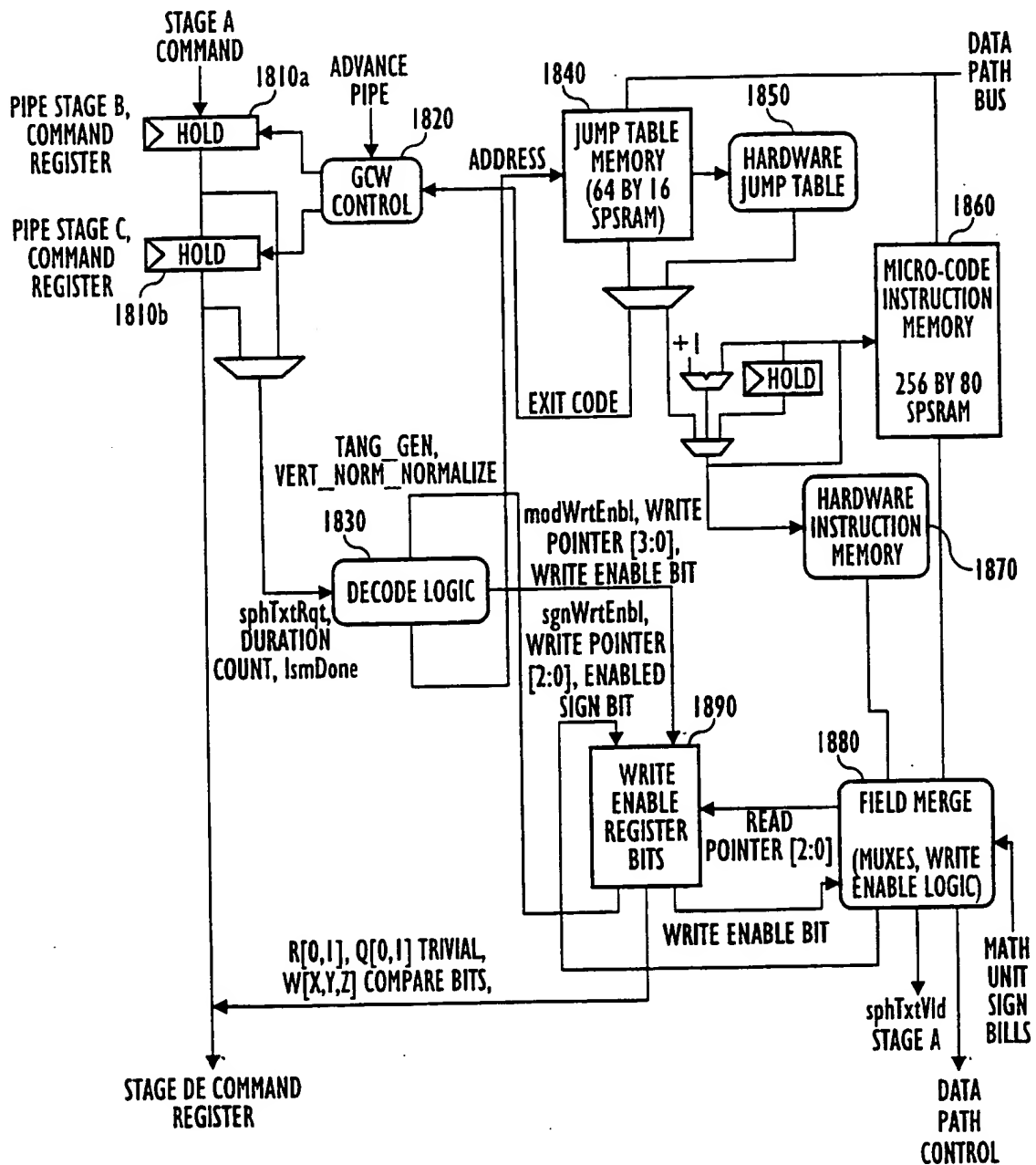


FIG. 17